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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



February 2010

*Sri Ramakrishna and the Common People*  
*Swami Vivekananda at Ellis Island*

Vol. 115, No. 2

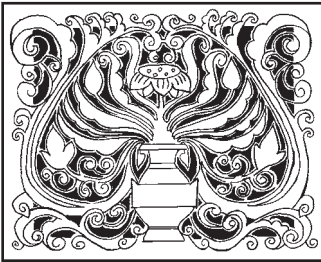


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Amrita Kalasha

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www.advaitaashrama.org

Cover photo: 'Spreading Wings' by Amitabha Bose

## Contents

Traditional Wisdom	169
This Month	170
Editorial: Harmony of Religions	171
Sri Ramakrishna and the Common People	173
Swami Tathagatananda	
Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to Human Values	178
Swami Sunirmalananda	
Swami Vivekananda at Ellis Island: New Findings	181
Somenath Mukherjee	
The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta – IX	187
Dr M Sivaramkrishna	
Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: Vision and Values	191
Dr Anil Baran Ray	
Maya: A Bhagavadgita Perspective	195
Dr D Nirmala Devi	
Four Basic Principles of Advaita Vedanta	198
Swami Bhajanananda	
Neo-Vedanta and the New World Order	203
Swami Atmapriyananda	
Mahendranath Gupta: The Morton Institution and Naimisharanya	207
Swami Chetanananda	

Reviews 213

Reports 215

# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## *Sri Ramakrishna on Harmony*

February 2010  
Vol. 115, No. 2

वंशनिश्रेणिसोपानैर्गृहोपरि तले जनाः ।  
यान्त्येवमीशलाभार्थमुपायानामनेकता ॥

As people on the ground can climb a housetop either using a bamboo (pole) or a ladder or a staircase, so also is there diversity in the means of reaching God.

‘मतेषु मार्गा भिद्यन्ते’ गम्य एको भवेन्नृणाम् ।  
यथेष्टस्थानमायान्ति पदप्लवरथैर्जनाः ॥

‘As many faiths so many paths’, but the goal is the same for all humans. People reach the goal of their choice on foot, aboard a boat, or atop a carriage.

एक एवेश्वरः किन्तु भावनामान्यनेकशः ।  
भावेन येन नाम्ना वा त्वमिच्छेस्तेन लभ्यते ॥

God is one but has many names and forms. You can reach him in whichever form and through whatever name you wish.

वेत्ति माता कः किमिच्छेत्तुल्यस्नेहाऽपि सूनुषु ।  
विभिन्नसाधकानीशः प्रीणयेद्भिन्नसाधनैः ॥

Though she loves all her children equally, the mother knows each one’s likings. God satisfies different spiritual aspirants through different means of sadhana.

नाना मतानि हिन्दूनां किं श्रेयस्तेषु चेच्छृणु ।  
विश्वासस्तव यत्रैव विश्वासे वसतीश्वरः ॥

The Hindus have diverse beliefs; if you wish to know which of these is best, listen: in whichever path you have faith (that is the best), for God abides in faith.

(Tryambaka Sharma Bhandarkar, ‘Sri-ramakrishnopadesha-dvishati’)



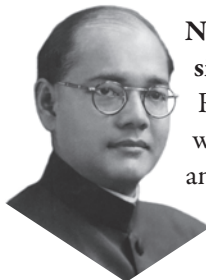
# THIS MONTH

Interreligious understanding and harmony are urgent necessities in today's strife-torn world marked by widespread religious conflict. A deeper look at Sri Ramakrishna's principle of **Harmony of Religions** is, therefore, an imperative for all peacemakers.

Swami Tathagatananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society, New York, draws our attention to Sri Ramakrishna's overpowering love for the distressed, the afflicted, and the humble in **Sri Ramakrishna and the Common People**.

While the need for value-oriented living is widely recognized, there is little unanimity over which values need to be accorded primacy. In **Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to Human Values**, Swami Sunirmalananda of Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, São Paulo, Brazil, discusses five universal values in the light of Swami Vivekananda's thought.

Osmania University, Hyderabad, reviews some texts presenting Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta in the context of art, aesthetics, colonial discourse, and philosophical and political narratives.



**Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: Vision and Values** is Prof. Anil Baran Ray's appraisal of Netaji's position with regard to fascism, socialism, and *samyavad*. The author is Professor, Department of Political Science, Burdwan University.

**Maya: A Bhagavadgita Perspective** is a brief study of the meaning and implications of the Vedantic concept of maya by Dr D Nirmala Devi, Reader, School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.

Swami Bhajanananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, writes about *ajnana* as the conjoint cause of the universe and the non-duality of Consciousness as he concludes his elucidation of **Four Basic Principles of Advaita Vedanta**.

Swami Atmapriyananda, Vice Chancellor, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, sums up his article on **Neo-Vedanta and the New World Order** with a discussion of the importance of karma yoga and the idea of Satya Yuga.

**Mahendranath Gupta: The Morton Institution and Naimisharanya** is Swami Chetanananda's representation of M, Mahendranath Gupta, as a unique educationist. The author is Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis.



Ellis Island, New York, was a key immigration port of the US at the turn of the nineteenth century. In **Swami Vivekananda at Ellis Island: New Findings** Somenath Mukherjee, Researcher, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, presents records of Swamiji's sojourn there and contextualizes his visit against the backdrop of the great human crosscurrents seen at the port.

In the ninth instalment of **The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta** Dr M Sivaramkrishna, former Head, Department of English,

## EDITORIAL

# Harmony of Religions

THE CONCEPT OF HARMONY OF RELIGIONS, which is now widely associated with Sri Ramakrishna's name, still remains poorly understood. This is not surprising, given the nuances of religious experience, political and social thinking, and theological intricacies it involves.

In 1840 the indologist H H Wilson noted that according to the Hindu view, 'every form of religion had equal merit and "God appointed to every tribe its own faith, and to every sect its own religion, that man might glorify Him in diverse modes, all having the same end, and being equally acceptable in His sight."' This has been the traditional popular Hindu outlook. It came in for criticism in the early twentieth century as 'indifferentism', as being based on ignorance of other religions, if not one's own. More recently some critics have taken Sri Ramakrishna's concept of 'harmony of religions' to mean 'all religions are the same' and termed it 'radical universalism', holding it responsible for Hindus being largely unaware of their own tradition and thus remaining particularly prone to being proselytized. While the latter charges may be true, radical universalism is a gross misrepresentation of Sri Ramakrishna's view, as Dr Jeffery Long pointed out in the January number. According to Sri Ramakrishna: 'There are different views. All these views are but so many paths to reach the same goal. But everyone believes that his view alone is right, that his watch alone keeps correct time. ... However wrong the watches may be, the Sun never makes a mistake. One should check one's watch with the sun.'

To people brought up in monolithic cultures and religious traditions, the idea still strikes as incredulous: 'How can all religions be true?' How can monotheism and polytheism be true simultaneously? And is each of all the sects that keep

mushrooming perennially equally true as the great religious traditions that have stood the test of time? Interestingly, most critics who ask this question are convinced of the truth of their own religions and, if they have looked at other religious traditions, are quick to point to faults therein. Sri Ramakrishna was also not blind to the faults in religions. But he did not support an 'exclusivist' view: 'You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply: Suppose there are. Every religion has errors. ... It is enough to have yearning for God. ... God is the Inner Guide?' Sri Ramakrishna 'was also aware of the existence of certain cults, sects, and groups which indulged in degenerate practices. He did not condemn them but compared them to the small back-door in old fashioned houses in India through which the scavenger enters the house to clean toilets.'

Another charge, brought from the opposite end, against the doctrine of harmony of religions is that of 'relativism': 'that all truth is relative, there is no absolute truth or Reality'. This again is a misrepresentation of Sri Ramakrishna's statement that the religions were 'but so many paths to reach the *same goal*'. 'Pluralism holds that there is one ultimate Truth or Reality, but this Truth admits of more than one valid formulation.' Swami Vivekananda 'took pluralism [articulated in the doctrine of harmony of religions] one step further by showing that pluralism must culminate in universalism'. Universalism, unfortunately, is no less misunderstood than pluralism. Swami Bhajananda's *Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda* has a summary discussion of some of the issues involved.

Scholars like Anantanand Rambachan and Paul Griffiths argue that 'views like the Harmony

of Religions undercut the intellectual activity of arguing for a tradition's truth claims'. This view is not wholly untrue: The numerous schools and systems of philosophy in ancient India and the various religious sects in the middle ages 'carried on vigorous polemics. The scholars of each school, some of whom may be ranked among the most brilliant thinkers in the world, tried to establish their view of Reality and their way of liberation to be the only true one and tried to prove the invalidity or falsity of the views of the other systems and schools.' This was the reason why Hindu culture learnt to be both tolerant of diversity as well as dialogical in its approach to diversity. Unfortunately, by the time of Sri Ramakrishna's advent, Hindu society had become badly sectarian. As the historian Nemai Sadhan Bose noted: 'The life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna was a shining illustration of the only course left to the nation to achieve that unity and integration. He showed that in India there was room for all kinds of sects but not for sectarianism. Diversity in faith and culture was a welcome adornment but narrow spirit of divisiveness was a curse. Respect for one's faith was a sign of strength but disrespect for others' beliefs was a sign of weakness of character and mental make-up.' Students of Sri Ramakrishna's life will see him as interested both in dialogue with various religious traditions as well as in meaningful debate.

Sri Ramakrishna's *dharma-samanvaya* 'was not derived from books or intellectual reasoning, but from his own direct mystical experience. For him religion meant direct experience, and not rituals and dogmas. He believed that if a person follows his religion with faith, sincerity and purity of mind, he is sure to attain direct spiritual experience. And he wanted everyone should follow his own religion and attain the highest fulfillment that it promises. This is what Sri Ramakrishna meant by harmony of religions.'

The primacy given to spiritual experience by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda has also evoked criticism. In traditional Vedic religion the Vedas, and not personal experiences, are the high-

est proof of the validity of religious truths. True. In his text 'Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna', Swami Vivekananda acknowledges as much: 'In matters of religious duty the Vedas are the only capable authority.' But then he adds, 'Rishihood, this power of supersensuous perception of the Vedas, is real religion. And so long as this does not develop in the life of an initiate, so long religion is a mere empty word to him.' The Vedas themselves invite humans to this transcendence where 'worlds are no worlds, gods no gods, Vedas no Vedas' and remind us that 'if one does not realize Brahman here, great destruction lies in wait'. The above criticism conflates a *pramana*, means of knowledge, with *purushartha*, aim of life.

When Swami Vivekananda says that 'doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details', he seems to be undercutting even some of the most cherished expressions of religion, including those of Hinduism. This was hardly his aim. He noted: 'The world's great spiritual giants have all been produced only by those religious sects which have been in possession of very rich mythology and ritual. All sects that have attempted to worship God without any form or ceremony have crushed without mercy everything that is beautiful and sublime in religion. Their religion is a fanaticism at best, a dry thing. The history of the world is a standing witness to this fact.'

Much of the dissent and fight between religions is, of course, in doctrinal details, social injunctions, and over political diktats. The vast majority of humanity can hardly access the supernal realms of realization of an avatara, a prophet, or a rishi. Participation in the rich religious expressions—'the secondary details'—is of great value to them. But what happens when our religion chooses to tell us that other traditions are false, need to be saved, or eliminated. Traditionally, social and political injunctions were needed to safeguard against such intrusions. In present times the principle of harmony of religions provides a basis for a genuine secularism that does not discount religion and also dialogue. A plural society can ignore it only at its own cost.

# ***Sri Ramakrishna and the Common People***

**Swami Tathagatananda**

**B**RAHMAN, the ultimate Reality, is characterized as ‘Satchidananda’: sat, chit, and ananda. Sat is the changeless ground of all existence. Chit is self-awareness or limitless knowledge, being self-luminous and spiritual amidst all material objects. Ananda is intrinsic bliss, which each of us experiences in different ways. The Taittiriya Upanishad says that Brahman is ‘the soul of truth, the delight of life, the bliss of mind, and the fullness of peace and eternity.’<sup>1</sup> The infinite absolute Being, out of love for tormented humanity, accepts suffering by being born as a human being. Satchidananda comes to us as the avatara—the avatara is God in human form. The avatara inundates the world with a flood of divine compassion, which brings life-transforming spiritual vibrations to the entire universe.

## ***Incarnation of Love***

Sri Ramakrishna, the avatara of the modern age, is Satchidananda, the incarnation of love. According to Sri Ramakrishna, ‘It is God alone who incarnates Himself as man to teach people the ways of love and knowledge.’<sup>2</sup> He says:

And we see God Himself if we but see His Incarnation. ... If you seek God, then seek Him in man; He manifests Himself more in man than in any other thing. If you see a man endowed with ecstatic love, overflowing with prema, mad after God, intoxicated with His love, then know for certain that God has incarnated Himself through that man.

There is no doubt that God exists in all things; but the manifestations of His power are different in different beings. The greatest manifestation of His Power is through an Incarnation. Again, in some Incarnations there is a complete manifest-

ation of God’s Power. It is the Śakti, the Power of God, that is born as an Incarnation (726).

Sri Ramakrishna saw God everywhere with such intense devotion that his body glowed with pure consciousness and his eyes shone with a spiritual lustre: two infinite pools of compassion. He experienced the full joy of the source of endless Bliss. Sister Nivedita calls it ‘the solitary grandeur and freedom of the soul’. He felt the vivid and powerful reality of God within and without. Every stage of his earthly journey was illumined by God-knowledge.

But Sri Ramakrishna did not want to keep this knowledge to himself. His entire being throbbed with the desire to convey it to souls bound in the mire of worldliness. His burning love for devotees leaves us rooted in motionless wonder and reverence. No secular affection can ever match this love. He was mad for God and for humans. He cared deeply about the fallen, the helpless, and the rejected, about all who struggle in the sea of ignorance. He was the friend of the hopeless and gave them his boundless love and consolation. Every one of his teachings is filled with love for the fallen. He did not reject or condemn anyone. However stained be their life, prodigal sons and daughters were never shunned by Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda says: ‘He was the Saviour of women, Saviour of the masses, Saviour of all, high and low.’<sup>3</sup> Worshipping God as the Divine Mother, the Master saw only the Divine Mother in every woman. Speaking about Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda said: ‘This man meant by worshipping woman, that to him every woman’s face was that of the Blissful Mother, and nothing but that. I myself have seen this man standing before those women whom society would not touch, and falling at their feet bathed in tears, saying, “Mother, in one form Thou art in the street,



and in another form Thou art the universe. I salute Thee, Mother, I salute Thee” (4.176).

Narrow-minded critics, however, strongly disapproved of Sri Ramakrishna's loving and protective attitude towards drunkards, prostitutes, and other persons of lax morals. They accused him of not rejecting them on moral grounds. The renowned German orientalist Max Müller responded to these accusations: 'If, as we are told, he did not show sufficient moral abhorrence of prostitutes, he does not stand quite alone in this among the founders of religion.'<sup>4</sup>

Out of his profound compassion, Sri Ramakrishna transformed many souls and made them worthy of being redeemed. Though constantly immersed in God-consciousness, he unceasingly and tirelessly brought goodness into the world with his irresistible power of love for God and man. He was at once the consoling friend of the bereaved and the oppressed and a passionate devotee of God.

Consumed with love for humanity and a desire to serve God in every being, Sri Ramakrishna cheerfully faced insult and dishonour in his labour of love. Transforming his love for God into dedicated service of God in human beings, he turned into a veritable hymn of service. His song of love, '*Yatra jiva, tatra shiva*; where the human soul is, there the Divine is', resounds in our mind. He shared God's mercy and love with everyone. Swami Vivekananda says:

The first part of my Master's life was spent in acquiring spirituality, and the remaining years in distributing it. ...

Men came in crowds to hear him, and he would talk twenty hours in the twenty-four, and that not for one day, but for months and months until at last the body broke down under the pressure of this tremendous strain. His intense love for mankind would not let him refuse to help even the humblest of the thousands who sought his aid. Gradually, there developed a vital throat disorder, and yet he could not be persuaded to refrain from these exertions. As soon as he heard that people were asking to see him, he would insist upon having them admitted, and would answer all their questions. When expostulated with,

he replied, 'I do not care. I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man.' There was no rest for him. ...

'While I can speak, I must teach them,' he would say, and he was as good as his word.<sup>5</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna gives every wretched soul his unconditional love and compassion. With his own purity, he purifies others. Teaching us to love God through his own love, he gives others hope for a better spiritual way of life. He is the wish-fulfilling embodiment of divine love in this world and has made us heir to that invaluable treasure.

### Service to All

The various compilers of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings provide us insights into the Master's selfless love for humanity expressed through service. Here is a moving narration by one of them, Suresh Chandra Datta:

Once, a slender and obviously poor man entered the Master's room. His feet were dirty. He addressed the Master, saying, 'Hello, Ramakrishna,' then sat on his bed. He patted the Master's shoulder and said, 'Brother, prepare a smoke for me.' The Master immediately rushed to prepare tobacco, but his devotees took the tobacco bowl from him and prepared the smoke. That man silently smoked for a while, then left, saying, 'Brother, I am Ram.' When he left, the devotees asked: 'Master, why did you try to prepare tobacco for him? You could easily have asked us to do it.' The Master replied, 'What is wrong with serving others?'<sup>6</sup>

Swami Vishuddhananda narrates another episode:

Once a friend of Mathur came to visit Dakshinewar and noticed that the garden was full of flowers. He saw the Master nearby and, mistaking him to be the gardener, asked him: 'Can you make a bouquet for me?' The Master made a beautiful bouquet and presented it to the gentleman. He was very pleased and after returning to Kolkata, told Mathur: 'Mathur, where from did you get such a good gardener? What a beautiful bouquet



he has made for me. Mathur felt something amiss and said: 'Let us go and see the gardener.' Both went to Dakshineswar. Mathur said to his friend: 'What have you done? He is not a gardener. He is the paramahansa.'<sup>7</sup>

As he revealed himself, Sri Ramakrishna offered his disciples the flower of their spiritual being. Coming down from the state of samadhi, he told them: 'Compassion for creatures! Compassion for creatures! You fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, you to show compassion to others! Who are you to show compassion? No, it cannot be. Not compassion for others, but rather the service of man, recognizing him to be a veritable manifestation of God.'<sup>8</sup> Only Narendra, later Swami Vivekananda, instantly caught the blazing flame of Sri Ramakrishna's suggestion and painstakingly forged it into the bold mission of his life. Before leaving the Master that day, Narendra turned to the other devotees and said:

What a wonderful light I have discovered in those words of the Master! How beautifully he has reconciled the ideal of Bhakti with the knowledge of the Vedanta, generally interpreted as dry, austere, and incompatible with human sentiments! What a grand, natural and sweet synthesis! ... Those following the paths of work and Yoga are similarly benefited by these words of the Master. The embodied being cannot remain even for a minute without activity. All his activities should be directed to the service of man, the manifestation of God upon earth, and this will accelerate his progress towards the goal. If it be the will of God, the day will soon come when I shall proclaim this grand truth before the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all, the wise and the fool, the rich and the poor, the Brahmin and the Pariah (139–40).

On 1 May 1897 the Ramakrishna Mission was established by Swami Vivekananda. He said shortly after: 'I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in *tamas* to stand on their own feet and be *men* inspired with the spirit of karma-yoga.'<sup>9</sup>

### **The Master's Love for Suffering Humanity**

In a hymn to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda extols him: 'He who was Shri Rama, whose stream of love flowed with resistless might even to the Chandala (the outcaste); Oh, who ever was engaged in doing good to the world though superhuman by nature. ... That renowned soul is born now as Shri Ramakrishna.'<sup>10</sup>

The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* contain innumerable anecdotes of the Master's unbounded love. His love consoled everyone, high or low. Though his special joy and motherly tenderness poured forth upon his innocent pure-hearted young disciples, his grace flowed freely upon all who approached him. Our present aim is to convey the impact of only one aspect of this grand and sublime life: his undying concern for the common person. Some events illustrate the power of God's love that flowed through Sri Ramakrishna. We begin with an incident at Dakshineswar portraying his motherly love for one of his disciples. This is followed by illustrations of the Master's love for the poor, the lowly, and the humble, of his mercy for an envious temple priest, of his loving manner towards bohemians, of his transforming touch, and of his concern for the plight of helpless creatures.

### **Loving Correction of a Young Disciple**

Latu, later Swami Adbhutananda, was the first young disciple to come to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The Master gave him various spiritual instructions and guided him carefully in the development of his character. When Latu came to the Master, he had the habit of making blunt remarks, which was gradually corrected by Sri Ramakrishna. One day, when a devotee at Dakshineswar misbehaved, Latu harshly reprimanded him. The Master happened to see Latu's rude behaviour and was filled with kindness. After the devotee left, he lovingly corrected Latu: 'It is not good to speak harshly to those who come here. They are tormented with worldly problems. If they come here and then are scolded for their shortcomings,

where will they go? In the presence of holy company never use harsh words to anyone, and never say anything to cause pain to another. ... Tomorrow, visit this man and speak to him in such a way that he will forget what you said to him today.”<sup>11</sup> Latu was humbled by Sri Ramakrishna’s loving words and gracious attitude towards him in correcting his weakness. He did as he was told and the following day visited the devotee. He recounts the incident thus: ‘So the next day I visited him. My pride was humbled. I spoke to him very sweetly. When I returned, however, the Master asked, “Did you offer him salutations from me?” Amazed at his words, I said that I had not. Then he said, “Go to him again and offer him my salutations.” So again I went to that man and conveyed the Master’s salutations. At this the devotee burst into tears. I was moved to see him weeping. When I returned this time the Master said, “Now your misdeed is pardoned”’ (ibid.). The humility that Latu saw in the Master gradually brought about his complete transformation; after this he was unable to hurt anyone’s feelings. Under the Master’s vigilant guidance Latu also made great progress in meditation.

### ***The Master’s Love for the Poor***

Sri Ramakrishna’s love for the famished villagers he met during his visit to Deoghar is well known. In 1868 Mathuranath Biswas accompanied Sri Ramakrishna on a pilgrimage to Varanasi and other places in North India. On the way they stopped for a few days at Deoghar to visit the local Shiva temple, a renowned place of pilgrimage. The Master was shocked to see the extreme poverty of the villagers. Pained to see their wretched condition, he wept. “You are”, said he to Mathur, “but a manager of Mother’s estate. Give these people sufficient oil to cool their heads and each a piece of cloth to wear and feed them to their fill once.” At first Mathur was a little hesitant and said, “Father, the pilgrimage will require much money and the poor are too many; I may later be in want of money if I began to do all that. What do you advise under these circumstances?” But the Master was not sat-

isfied with this reply. There was an incessant flow of tears from his eyes to see the misery of the villagers and his heart was filled with an unprecedented compassion. “You rascal, I will not go to your Kasi. I will remain here with them; they have none to call their own; I will not leave them behind and go.”<sup>12</sup> The Master sat down with those poor villagers and refused to take another step. Seeing the depth of the Master’s compassion, Mathur fulfilled his wish, making the villagers very happy. Sri Ramakrishna felt their joy as his own and proceeded gladly with Mathur to Kashi.

On another occasion, Sri Ramakrishna visited Ranaghat, Mathur’s native village. There too, his love and overwhelming compassion poured out, this time for Mathur’s poverty-stricken tenants, and he requested Mathur to stop taxing them. Mathur obeyed him, though very reluctantly. In this way, Sri Ramakrishna’s desire to alleviate the condition of those poor tenants was achieved.<sup>13</sup> The Master’s selfless love for the poor is a true reflection of his attitude towards money, the touch of which caused him extreme pain.

The well-known physician Dr Mahendralal Sarkar, a homeopathic doctor of Calcutta, was invited to manage the treatment of Sri Ramakrishna’s final illness, throat cancer, first at Shyampukur and later at Kashipur, where the Master spent the last eight months of his life. At Kashipur Sri Ramakrishna hinted to M the extent of his physical suffering: ‘I have gone on suffering so much for fear of making you all weep. But if you all say, “Oh, there is so much suffering! Let the body die,” then I may give up the body.’<sup>14</sup> Despite his own suffering, the Master remained aware of the plight of the poor as the following episode illustrates.

On the day of Car festival of Lord Jagannath, the Master asked Sashi to go out and see the festival. Sashi at first declined to go leaving the Master alone on the sick bed. But the Master prevailed upon him to do so. Sashi went reluctantly and saw the festival and the fair held in that connection at a place not very far from the garden. At the fair Sashi purchased a small knife worth only

two pice for cutting lemons for the Master. On his return the Master was delighted to see the knife and said, 'You should not fail to visit such festivals and make some purchase however small. Poor people prepare so many things on these special occasions and bring them to the fair for sale with the hope of earning something. Try to keep up the ancient traditions as far as practicable and encourage others to do so.'<sup>15</sup>

### **The Master with Rasik, the Humble Sweeper**

No person is too lowly for God's grace, as the familiar story of Rasik, the sweeper of the Dakshineswar temple, illustrates. Rasik was simple and guileless; his pure heart was given to God. He longed to meet Sri Ramakrishna, whom he called 'father', but suffered under the restrictions of his caste and related social prejudice. He could only watch with longing as others came close to the Master and were redeemed. He wept for Sri Ramakrishna's grace. One day he prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna as he was returning from the Panchavati, absorbed in a spiritual mood. 'What will happen to me?' he cried. Sri Ramakrishna was touched by Rasik's earnestness. Gazing at him with full compassion, he blessed Rasik: 'You will see me at the time of death.'

Two years after the Master's demise, Rasik fell gravely ill. He did not take medicines. He only drank *charanamrita*, sanctified water, which sustained him, gave him some energy, and ended the fever. He spent his waking hours chanting God's name and praying earnestly for his grace. Lying on a mat in his tulsi grove, his rosary in hand, the blessed Rasik died in full consciousness visualizing the presence of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna's great assurance to Rasik was fulfilled to the letter.

A similar event occurred in the life of Pratapchandra Hazra, who is familiar to all readers of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* for his hypocritical ways and criticism of Sri Ramakrishna. Hazra used to call Swami Vivekananda his friend. Swamiji intervened on his behalf and persuaded Sri Ramakrishna to bless him. Hazra died peacefully and happily in

a manner similar to Rasik.

These events remind us of the story of a temple gardener who was loved by Sri Ramakrishna for his simple pious life. One night he saw a bright radiance flowing from Sri Ramakrishna's body while the Master was meditating under the bel tree. It was brighter than lightning, brighter than the sun. He was so astounded that he left the spot in fear, but the next morning he fell tearfully at the Master's feet and said: 'Master, please bless me.' Ramakrishna gently raised him up and said, 'Meditate on the form that you saw last night. Clean this path that leads to the Panchavati. Many devotees will come here in the future.'<sup>16</sup>

(To be concluded)

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# Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to Human Values

Swami Sunirmalananda

**Y**OU OWN A CAR. You have enough money for gas. You know how to drive and have a driver's license too. The roads are good. But still you cannot drive as you wish—you have to obey traffic rules; you cannot drive down the wrong lane.

Values are 'you first, I last' principles. There is a difference between humans and lower creatures in doing things consciously. The lives of non-humans are largely self-centered. Ours should ideally be other-centered, but this is not true of all. Living self-centered lives demands no education, and often leads to disastrous results. Value-based living involves training and reorientation of all our conscious activities—thinking, feeling, and willing—so that we are in harmony with others. This is the ideal.

## ***Of Gods and Demons***

We are speaking about the need for values. We need values to live well and be a success in society, to form our character, to be acceptable to others, and for our own perfection. Numerous studies on human values are being currently conducted and many courses on values are also on offer. Truth, loyalty, honesty, purity, altruism, non-violence, peace, love—these are among a list of noble qualities which each one of us is asked to cultivate. They are all interconnected and interdependent, and the practice of even one to perfection is bound to lead to the manifestation of other qualities in our lives. This has been proved by the examples of many saints.

Choosing the correct path—the path of virtue—is the issue at stake. In the Bhagavadgita Sri Krishna has dedicated the sixteenth chapter to the exposition of divine and demoniac qualities. Every child has two paths to choose from: the road to 'god-

hood' and the road to 'demon-hood'. What impels children to take to either of them is the unconscious decision-making process based on past impressions, the environment into which they have been put—determined, once again, largely by past impressions—and the training they receive. This does not in any way mean that all is over for one who has chosen the wrong path. Karma is a positive philosophy and not fatalism. Vedanta is also all positive, and says that things can and will change for the better. And according to Swami Vivekananda, there is no 'error' but only 'lesser truth'.

Why do an overwhelmingly large number of people choose the wrong path? As Sri Krishna himself says, the two paths are placed in such a way that there is this puzzle for the chooser: to select the one full of nectarine sweetness in the beginning or the other full of nectar in the end. What's wrong if the nectar is in the beginning or at the end, one may ask? There is the well-known story of a man who wanted to choose between hell and heaven. He went to see them both for himself. In hell there was a lot of singing and dancing and fun. In heaven he saw only silent and serene faces. So he chose hell at the time of death. The next moment he landed in a cauldron and found himself being fried. He was furious at being so cheated. What about those wonderful things, he asked. 'Ah, what you saw was our showroom,' came the prompt response.

So we must be careful not to be fooled by appearances; we need to deliberately choose the path of the gods. But why should we be gods? The traditional Vedantic answer is that we *are* gods, and we have only to remember this truth that we keep forgetting time and again. We are not becoming something new.



This, then, is the importance of human values. We are gods, but we suffer. We do understand why we suffer. When we know who we really are, our suffering ends. To know who we are, we must follow the right path, the path of the gods. Values like goodness, purity, and truthfulness are important not only to live well here and to be persons with noble characters, but also to change our inner personality for the better, to clean ourselves of negative past impressions, and consequently to manifest our innate divinity.

### Five Universal Values

We mentioned 'values' as a generic term. But there is a problem with the term itself. Swami Vivekananda points out: 'The idea of duty varies much among different nations. In one country, if a man does not do certain things, people will say he has acted wrongly; while if he does those very things in another country, people will say that he did not act rightly—and yet we know that there must be some universal idea of duty.'<sup>1</sup> To cite an example: non-violence as a value is good, but it cannot be insisted upon under all circumstances. Each culture and region has a different mindset, and we cannot force the same set of values upon all. Prophets of old taught values depending upon the region in which they preached and the nature of the people they were speaking to. But when we view things from the perspective of our global village, in the contemporary context, we need to think of global values for global times. Herein lies the importance of Swami Vivekananda's original contribution to this field.

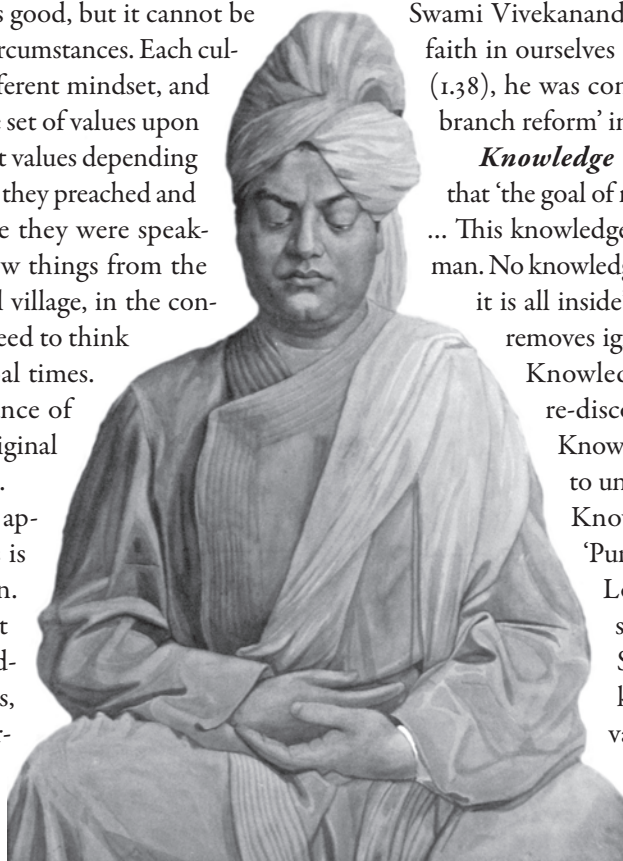
Swami Vivekananda's approach to human values is universal, as is his vision. He no doubt spoke about truth, purity, and goodness, among other values, but he laid stress on certain other fundamental qualities that help one

actualize a value-oriented living; and these have a universal character. Five basic qualities that Swami Vivekananda emphasized provide us with insight into the uniqueness of his approach to values.

**Faith** • Swami Vivekananda's brilliance lies in his pointing out the fundamental problem in practising a value-based life: lack of faith in oneself. He asserted that faith in oneself is the key to solving all the complex problems of life. In so doing he showed us the singular remedy for all existential ills. We are divine; this insight is the cornerstone of value-based living. He said: 'Suppose we can find one element out of which we can manufacture all the other elements. Then chemistry, as a science, will have become perfect' (6.10). So faith in oneself is the key to values, key to success in any endeavour, key to resolving our existential problems, and the key to attaining the highest end of life. Without faith in oneself, how can a person be *truly* truthful, helpful, or generous, or manifest all the other human virtues we spoke of earlier? So, when

Swami Vivekananda said 'We must have faith in ourselves first and then in God' (1.38), he was contemplating 'root and branch reform' in human values.

**Knowledge** • Swamiji declared that 'the goal of mankind is knowledge. ... This knowledge, again, is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside' (1.27–8). Knowledge removes ignorance and suffering. Knowledge also leads to the re-discovery of our true Self. Knowledge opens the doors to universality and oneness. Knowledge leads to love. 'Pure Knowledge and Pure Love are one and the same thing,' declared Sri Ramakrishna. So knowledge as a human value is vital to human living.




Painting at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

**Service** • This is another universal human value, for ‘the highest use of life is to hold it at the service of all beings’ (3.84). ‘To the vast majority of mankind, the body is everything; the body is all the universe to them; bodily enjoyment is their all in all. ... Nevertheless, our bodies have to go; there is no permanence about them. Blessed are they whose bodies get destroyed in the service of others’ (3.83). ‘Every act of love brings happiness; there is no act of love which does not bring peace and blessedness as its reaction’ (1.57).

**Sacrifice** • ‘The gist of morality is sacrifice—not I but thou’ (6.146). ‘No great work has been done in the world without sacrifice’ (7.216). Faith in oneself brings forth all the noble qualities in the individual; knowledge diminishes separations of ‘I’ and ‘you’; service unifies all; and sacrifice reveals the nobility of the soul and also prepares one for the attainment of supreme peace. So, these values form a graded process of spiritual evolution. Swamiji remarked: ‘Self-sacrifice, not self-assertion, is the law of the highest universe’ (6.83).

**Freedom** • Freedom from fear, limitation, and egotism—these are the essential principles of the true and illumined life according to Swami Viveka-

nanda. ‘Everything that we perceive around us is struggling towards freedom, from the atom to the man, from the insentient, lifeless particle of matter to the highest existence on earth, the human soul. The whole universe is in fact the result of this struggle for freedom’ (1.108). Peace and freedom are synonymous. Human values, when practised correctly, not only help develop individual personality but also bring peace to society. A person of peace creates peace all around. ‘Blessedness, eternal peace, arising from perfect freedom, is the highest concept of religion’ (1.337).

Human beings only frame laws to regulate social behaviour, but prophets recognize eternal natural and spiritual principles and draw our attention to them. Swami Vivekananda was doing so when he elucidated the five human values we just discussed. These subsume the many other values that we need to nurture for healthy human development and they underscore the glory of human existence. 

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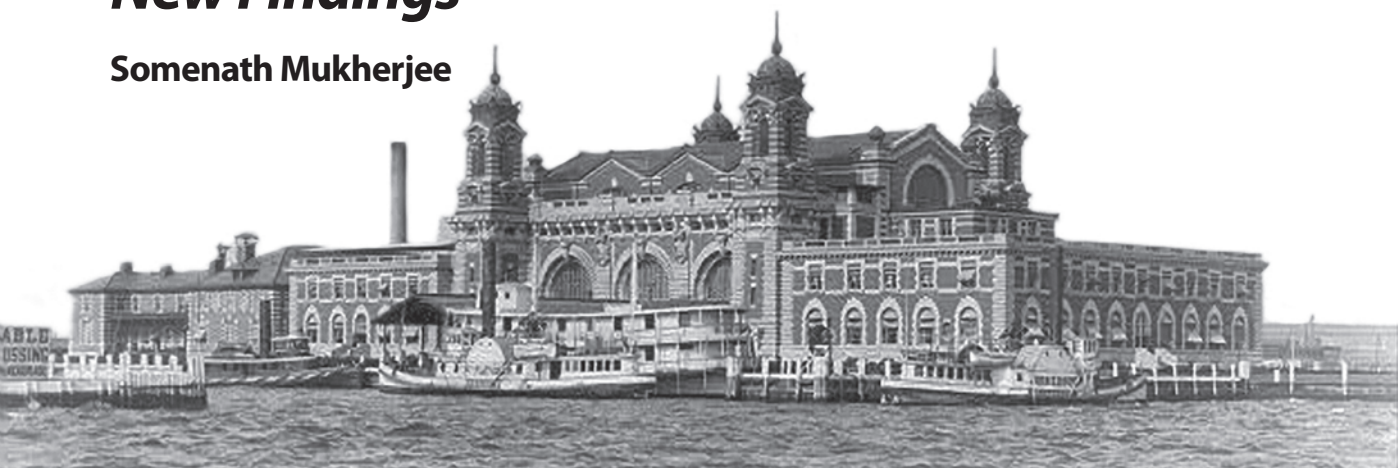
**I**t is the presence within him of this idea of perfection that makes man a spiritual being. But the awareness of it does not necessarily mean that he will consistently work for its realisation. In other words, the capacity for self-criticism is not the same as the capacity for self-determination. The reason for his failure to respond to this inner call is that he is also a natural being, in that he is urged by the lower impulses which he has inherited from the past. That is, he is not only inspired by a consciousness of what he ought to be; he is also what he is, which tends to keep him bound to the pursuit of inferior ends. He has ‘a footing in nature as well as a winging in the sky’. This double character usually results in an internal conflict between the flesh and the spirit or, as they are otherwise termed, the lower and the higher selves. There seems to be a lesion, as it

were, between the two selves so that the promptings of the higher self have no practical influence on the lower, if man does not seriously and wholeheartedly will to ‘erect himself above himself’. This is what the Gītā means when it describes that man is his own friend or his own foe, according as he chooses to live. In other words, man is the master of his fate, and he has the freedom to rise or to fall. One fortunate circumstance, however, is that man’s higher nature does not allow itself to be either ignored or suppressed, unless he has once for all sunk back into the life of the mere animal, destroying his proper humanity. The imperative to the higher life is always there within him, and he cannot be at peace with himself, until he finally makes up his mind to obey it, overcoming all adverse influences.

—M Hiriyanna, *Indian Conception of Values*, 7–8

# Swami Vivekananda at Ellis Island: New Findings

Somenath Mukherjee



Ellis Island in 1905

**D**URING HIS TWO VISITS TO THE WEST, Swami Vivekananda entered America thrice. The first was his journey to Chicago for the World Parliament of Religions. He landed at Vancouver, Canada, and reached Chicago by railroad. After his first visit to England, the swami returned to the US—entering this time through New York. His third entry, which marked the beginning of his second visit to the West, was again through New York. The last two trips were made by ship.

On 24 April 1897 the swami wrote to Sarala Ghosal, the editor of the magazine *Bharati*:

In New York I used to observe the Irish colonists come—downtrodden, haggard-looking, destitute of all possessions at home, penniless, and wooden-headed—with their only belongings, a stick and a bundle of rags hanging at the end of it, fright in their steps, alarm in their eyes. A different spectacle in six months—the man walks upright, his attire is changed! In his eyes and steps there is no more sign of fright. What is the cause? Our Vedanta says that that Irishman was kept surrounded by contempt in his own country—the whole of nature was telling him with one voice, ‘Pat, you have no more hope, you are born a slave and will remain so’. Having been thus told from his birth, Pat be-

lieved in it and hypnotised himself that he was very low, and the Brahman in him shrank away. While no sooner had he landed in America than he heard the shout going up on all sides, ‘Pat, you are a man as we are. It is man who has done all, a man like you and me can do everything: have courage!’ Pat raised his head and saw that it was so, the Brahman within woke up. Nature herself spoke, as it were, ‘Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.’<sup>1</sup>

In this article we shall look at what the swami probably experienced while using a specific entry point into the US: Ellis Island, a small Upper New York Bay island, located in close proximity to the famous Statue of Liberty. His experiences here are likely to have had a link to what he wrote in the above letter.

## The Ellis Island

Ellis Island, located about 1.6 km southwest of Manhattan Island, New York City, was once the principal immigration reception centre of the US. Located around 400 meters east of the New Jersey shore, the ‘isle’ now consists of one natural and two artificial islands, joined by causeways. In 1890 Ellis



Island was designated the site of the first federal immigration station by President Benjamin Harrison. Prior to that, individual states were responsible for regulating immigration, not the federal government. The Castle Garden—originally known as Castle Clinton—had served as the immigration station for New York State in those days.

Due to a host of reasons—political instability, restrictive religious laws and, above all, the economic instability that marked the whole of the nineteenth century, becoming particularly intense in the latter half—the largest human influx from European countries into America took place during this period. Castle Garden could no longer handle this mass exodus. The federal government had to step in and a new federally-operated immigration centre on Ellis Island took up the responsibility of managing immigration formalities. On 2 January 1892 the *New York Times* reported: ‘The new buildings on Ellis Islands constructed for the use of the Immigration Bureau were yesterday formally occupied by the officials of that department. ... Col. Weber [the Superintendent of Immigration] was on the island at 8 o’clock and went on a tour of inspection to see that everything was in readiness for the reception of the first boatload of immigrants.’<sup>2</sup> The report, which had a detailed description of the

inaugural day, added: ‘It was quite a populous little island about noon when the steerage passengers from the three big steamships were being disembarked, but within a very short time they had all been disposed of. Those destined for local points were placed on board the ferryboat Brinkerhoff and landed at the Barge Office. Those going to other places were taken to the various railroad stations by the immigrant transports’ (ibid.).

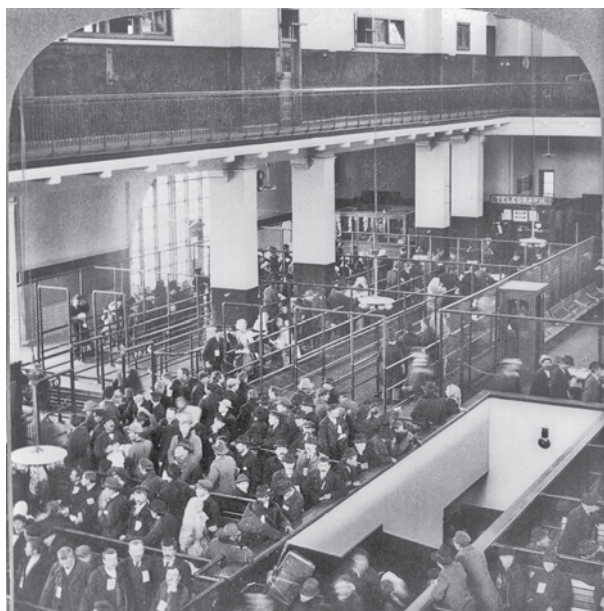
Col. Weber was noted as saying, ‘We can easily handle 7,000 immigrants in one day here.’ We also learn that ‘the building was erected by the Federal Government at a cost of \$500,000’ (ibid.). And as to the formalities of dealing with the immigrants, the report continues:

The wharves are so arranged that immigrants from two vessels can be landed at the same time. As soon as disembarked the passengers are shown up a broad stairway on the southern side of the building. Turning to the left they pass through ten aisles, where are stationed as many registry clerks. After being registered, those of the immigrants who have to be detained are placed in a wire-screened inclosure. The more fortunate ones pass on to a similar compartment where those going to the West are separated from those bound for New-England or local points (ibid.).

These arrangements continued for the next 30 years, more or less, enabling more than 12 million immigrants to enter the US; and as a voyager Swami Vivekananda was once a witness to these mammoth procedures.

Though the US had entry points at other ports too, the greater number of immigrants came through New York harbour. It always remained the most popular destination for leading steamship companies. With regular large-scale immigration, unsympathetic treatment of helpless people as also tragic situations were not uncommon at Ellis Island. This later became a reason for many to call it the ‘Island of Tears’. Umpteen stories, fictional accounts, autobiographies, and reminiscences bear witness to such incidents, which had three primary reasons: First, there was a gradual change in the US

*Arrival at Ellis Island*





immigration laws, particularly in the later part of the nineteenth century, to restrict unwanted entrants. Second was the mix of massive human despondency and administrative inadequacy to deal with various situations. Frequent disregard of immigration strictures by steamship companies bent on making quick profit from mass immigration was the third factor.

A report in the *New York Times* of 8 May 1895 informs us that a great number of prospective immigrants on SS *Victoria*, arriving from Naples on 28 April 1895, were debarred from landing by the immigration authorities which filed the following report:

From the records in this office it appears that this vessel brought 470 steerage passengers; that 280 of them were landed after inspection by the immigration authorities at Ellis Island, and 190 were detained for special inquiry. The Board, after duly considering each case, finally ordered 87 of these detained passengers deported. The unusually large number ordered deported clearly indicates that the Anchor Line Steamship Company, to which this vessel belongs, does not carefully inspect its steerage passengers at the port of embarkation prior to sailing, thus ignoring the plain requirements of the act of March 3, 1893, which was intended to save the immigrant a fruitless voyage.<sup>3</sup>

Such dismal and unfriendly reception was largely the fate of steerage passengers who came in hordes from different corners of Europe. And among those voyagers were a great many people whose life and dreams had been shattered in their homelands for various reasons, leaving them in extreme poverty and despondency. These people had journeyed to the dreamland called America to start lives afresh, enduring inhuman suffering in the cramped steerage of ships. None of the first and second class passengers were subjected to anything beyond a cursory inspection. This was because of the belief that those who could afford upper-class journeys were unlikely to become a public liability for medical or legal reasons.

The incoming ships would usually dock at the Hudson or East River piers. From the piers the un-

fortunate steerage and third-class passengers were transported by ferry or barge to Ellis Island, where rigorous legal and medical check-up awaited them. And what was their general condition while facing this examination where failure meant deportation? They were mostly seasick, if not also ailing from other causes, having been cramped in unsanitary conditions near the ship bottom while making the two-week crossing of the rough Atlantic.

The inspection, carried out by the United States Public Health Service and the Bureau of Immigration, was held in the registry room called 'Great Hall' and normally took around three to five hours. Although the aforementioned *New York Times* report gives a rather high deportation figure, according to later day official reports only two per cent of the arriving immigrants were disallowed entry and so had to sail back.

Why did so many people come to the US, and why was such prolonged immigration allowed? The answer lay in the very character of the country we call America. First, an overwhelming proportion of the US population had their origin in other countries. Despite the then high birthrate, the nineteenth-century industrial expansion called for huge immigration to meet the growing need for workers. Between 1866 and 1915 an estimated 25 million immigrants had entered the US. Besides industrial workers, there were also farm hands and menials. The US Government had to welcome this human flood gushing in from different countries, largely through the Ellis Island conduit, as it helped the country prosper and grow strong.

### Swami Vivekananda's Voyage

The SS *Britannic*, with Swami Vivekananda on the board, left Liverpool on 27 November 1895 and reached New York on 6 December. On Thursday morning, 5 December, the swami wrote to Alberta Sturges: 'The steamer is standing at anchor on account of fog. The purser has very kindly given me a whole cabin by myself. Every Hindu is a Raja, they think, and are very polite—and the charm will break, of course, when they find that the Raja

is penniless!!<sup>4</sup> He also wrote an undated letter to E T Sturdy from aboard the *Britannic*:

‘So far the journey has been very beautiful. The purser has been very kind to me and gave me a cabin to myself. The only difficulty is the food—meat, meat, meat. Today they have promised to give me some vegetables.

‘We are standing at anchor now. The fog is too thick to allow the ship to proceed. So I take this opportunity to write a few letters.

‘It is a queer fog almost impenetrable though the



The SS Britannic

sun is shining bright and cheerful’ (8.358–9).

On 8 December he wrote to Sara Chapman Bull: ‘I arrived last Friday after ten days of a very tedious voyage. It was awfully rough and for the first time in my life I was very badly seasick’ (6.352). Marie Louise Burke notes: ‘On Friday, December 6, at 4:24 a.m., the *Brittanic* [sic] at last crossed Sandy Hook Bar outside the harbor of New York. The temperature was six degrees below freezing and a sharp wind was blowing, but the sky was clear and the sun rising when, after the usual long stop at the quarantine station at Ellis Island, the ship was piloted toward the docks of Manhattan.’<sup>5</sup>

### New Findings

In 1965 Lyndon B Johnson, the thirty-sixth president of the US, declared Ellis Island part of the Statue of Liberty Monument. The Ellis Island Museum presently displays exciting records of the ships that brought around 22 million immigrants, crew mem-

bers, and other passengers to Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954. The ships had to maintain written lists—called ‘manifests’—with information on each of the immigrants and passengers they brought to Ellis Island. These manifests, which were used for examining potential immigrants, are now kept at the Ellis Island Museum. This includes the manifest of SS *Britannic* that brought Swami Vivekananda from Liverpool on 6 December 1895. This manifest comprises ten handwritten pages, of which the first one bears the title ‘CUSTOMS LIST OF PASSENGERS’ and is signed by H J Haddock, the shipmaster.

The *Britannic* manifest shows that the ship sailed on 27 November 1895, with 250 passengers on board. Of these, 201 were steerage passengers and 49 occupied cabins. The number included 26 children in the steerage and 5 infirm passengers—4 in the steerage and 1 in a cabin. Only 25 passengers were US citizens, the other 225 were aliens. Swami Vivekananda’s is the 47th name among cabin passengers. The museum’s ‘Passenger Record’ has the following particulars for Swami Vivekananda:

First Name: *Swanie*  
 Last Name: *Swami Vivekananda*  
 Ethnicity: *India*  
 Last Place of Residence: [Left Blank]  
 Date of Arrival: *Dec 06, 1895*  
 Age at Arrival: *30*  
 Gender: *M*  
 Marital Status: [Left Blank]  
 Ship of Travel: *Britannic*  
 Port of Departure: *Queenstown*  
 Manifest Line Number: *0047*<sup>6</sup>

The manifest showed the swami as a ‘transient’ passenger, and he was reported to have had 3 items of luggage. In the column marked ‘Calling or Occupation’, he was recorded to have ‘none’.

Now let us take a look at the 201 steerage passengers. All of them came from different countries of Europe. The ‘Calling or Occupation’ column provides an idea of their vocational variety: Labour, grocer, mechanic, dressmaker, servant, butcher, domestic [help], store-keeper, broker, saddler, grinder, plumber, farmer, baker, miner, cattleman, engine-

No.	NAME IN FULL	Age	Sex	Calling or Occupation	Country of Birth	Native Country	Intended Destination (State or Territory)	Place of Birth (State or Territory)	Transit (Transit or Temporary Residence)	Location of Employment or Business	Number of Family Members	Port of Embarkation	Date and Cause of Death
24	Mrs. Hall Jones	26	F	none	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	0-2
25	North	10	M	none	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	2-2
26	Miss Gowler	25	F	none	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	
27	Amie Gowler	24	F	wife	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	
28	Elizabeth Russell	51	F	none	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	3	✓	
29	William Lin. May	24	M	none	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓	
30	J. M. Murphy	30	M	Miner Agent	Ireland		✓	✓	✓	✓	31	✓	3-1
31	Robert H. H. H.	53	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓	
32	John H. H.	54	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓	
33	Geo. D. H. H.	21	M	none	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	2-1
34	William H. H.	23	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	
35	Michael H. H.	24	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	2	✓	
36	W. A. H. H.	30	M	none	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	1-1
37	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
38	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
39	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
40	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
41	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
42	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
43	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
44	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
45	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
46	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
47	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
48	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
49	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
50	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
51	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
52	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
53	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
54	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
55	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
56	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
57	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
58	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
59	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
60	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
61	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
62	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
63	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
64	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
65	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
66	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
67	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
68	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
69	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
70	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
71	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
72	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
73	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
74	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
75	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
76	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
77	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
78	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
79	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
80	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
81	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
82	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
83	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
84	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
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86	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
87	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
88	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
89	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
90	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
91	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
92	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
93	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
94	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
95	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
96	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
97	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
98	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
99	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
100	William H. H.	47	M	Merchant	England		✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	

Page 8 of the Britannic manifest, showing in line 47 the name of Vivekananda

driver, fireman, decorator, cotton dyer, sea-man, boot-maker, shoemaker, carpenter, hotel-keeper, sailor, among others. The list is representative, to a large extent, of the nature of immigrants that Europe continually poured into America as steerage passengers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In his perceptive study *The American Past: A Survey of American History* Joseph R Conlin notes:

Most of the people who came to the United States after 1880 were peasants. ... Tickets, at least, were cheap. By the 1890s, heated competition among steamship companies in both northern and southern Europe pushed the price of transatlantic passage in steerage (the lowest class) below \$20 and sometimes as low as \$10. There were humiliating but important ceremonies on departure day: a rude bath and fumigation for lice on the docks, and a more than casual examination by company doctors for contagious diseases (especially tuberculosis), insanity, feeble-mindedness, and trachoma (an inflammation of the eye that leads to blindness and was common in Italy and Greece at the time). On the other side of the Atlantic, United States immigration authorities would refuse entry to anyone who suffered from these diseases, and the company that had brought them over was re-

quired to take them back. ...

Processing at Ellis Island was an experience that few immigrants ever forgot. Crowds milled and shoved for position before they entered the maze of pile railings that took them from station to station. Instructions boomed over loud speakers in half a dozen languages; children wailed; and anxious parents called for their lost children. The first person to examine the immigrants was a doctor who was supposed to make an instant diagnosis of afflictions for which the newcomers might be denied entry. If he saw a facial rash, he marked a large *F* on the immigrant's clothing with a piece of soft white chalk. People so marked were cut out of the herd and examined more closely. *H* meant suspected heart disease; *L* meant limp and examination for rickets (children were made to do a little dance; and a circle around a cross meant feeble-mindedness and thus immediate return to the ship. Thousands of families were faced with the awful decision, which had to be made within moments, whether to return to Europe with a relative who had been forbidden entry or to push on.<sup>7</sup>

### The Witness Monk

Swami Vivekananda was witness to the making of



America at the end of the nineteenth century. If we stretch our imagination and see the swami crossing the Atlantic with some two hundred hapless people uprooted from their soil by human miseries, we can hardly think of him as having remained unconcerned. At the same time, he could never have remained unmindful of the dreams people ceaselessly pursue, disregarding the magnitude of misfortunes thrust upon them. So far as we know, Swami Vivekananda never spoke directly about his Ellis Island experience. But he could hardly have distanced his emotions and concern from such a remarkable aspect of American life. Somewhere deep within him he surely would have retained those experiences, thus enriching his immense sympathy for humankind. Maybe someday, somewhere, some piece of writing or utterance would suddenly surface, smeared with his deep concern for those unfortunate people with whom he once travelled.

Of the 250 passengers aboard the *Britannic*, 50 came from Ireland—40 of whom were in the steerage and 7 were cabin passengers. The history of Irish immigrants calls for special attention to assess the accuracy of what the swami wrote in his letter to Sarala Ghosal. Joseph Conlin writes:

The story is a little different for the people of southern Ireland, then officially a part of Great Britain but far from British in sentiment. Almost all of the 3.4 million Irish who came to the United States between 1845 and 1900 spoke English, and they too were familiar with the rudiments of Anglo-American culture. ... The Irish arrived not only much poorer ... but practically starved. Their land had been exploited by England for centuries. Brutalized by poverty, the Irish were considered by their English lords to be semi-barbaric, stupid, and addicted to drunken riot as their recreation. ... Irish-Americans took with zest to their adopted home. ... By the 1880s, Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans dominated urban politics in much of the East and Midwest (ibid.).

On his second visit to the West, Swami Vivekananda journeyed from Glasgow and reached New York on 28 August 1899. On 22 August Miss MacLeod wrote to Sarah Bull: 'Swamiji's boat the *Nu-*

*midian* sailed on August 17th & is due in New York on *Monday August 28th*'; but her plans of receiving the swami at the harbour remained unfulfilled, for 'the *Numidian* steamed into the New York harbor two or three hours earlier than scheduled'.<sup>8</sup>

The Ellis Island Museum's records for this trip are rather incomplete. This is because, owing to a devastating fire on 14 June 1897 that consumed almost the entire infrastructure at Ellis Island, the Island's offices remained dysfunctional up to 17 December 1900. The *Numidian*'s manifest tells us that the ship left Glasgow on 17 August 1899 and reached New York port on 28 August. The manifest, signed by shipmaster John Park, apparently contained a single sheet, partly incomplete, with names of only eleven passengers and no trace of Swami Vivekananda. My communications with the Ellis Island Museum for tracing the swami's record are yet to yield results.

During a speech at Boston on 28 March 1896, eighteen days before he ended his first visit to America, Swami Vivekananda said:

When I first came to this country, after a few days I thought I would be able to write a book on the nation. But after three years' stay here, I find I am not able to write even a page. On the other hand, I find in travelling in various countries that beneath the surface differences that we find in dress and food and little details of manners, man is man all the world over; the same wonderful human nature is everywhere represented. Yet there are certain characteristics, and in a few words I would like to sum up all my experiences here. In this land of America, no question is asked about a man's peculiarities. If a man is a man, that is enough, and they take him into their hearts, and that is one thing I have never seen in any other country in the world.<sup>9</sup>

Such feelings could hardly have been expressed if the swami were unaware of the inner spirit of the country he so cherished. And the inner spirit of America can never disown the history of Ellis Island. Before concluding, let us look at the words of wisdom for newcomers to the US from an immigrants' manual of 1891:

(Continued on page 197)



# ***The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta – IX***

**Dr M Sivaramkrishna**

**C**OLONIALISM CONTINUES TO BE an important area of exploration in various disciplines. Understandably, India is a major focus. And almost invariably Ramakrishna-Vedanta figures in various contexts. While religious studies dominate, there is a recent trend towards examining refreshingly new facets. One such—which I found of great interest—is ‘Swami Vivekananda and art’.

## ***Art, Aesthetics, and Swami Vivekananda***

One of the most exhaustive and penetrating studies in this area is Gwilym Beckerlegge’s ‘The Swami and the Artist: The Use of Indian Art in Swami Vivekananda’s Apologetics’, a pioneering analysis breaking new ground in the assessment of Swami Vivekananda’s spectacularly splendid versatility.<sup>1</sup> The arguments and data provided are exhaustive and original. Beckerlegge’s core argument is not ‘to offer ... a rival account of the recent history of Indian art. Instead, it traces the relationship between Vivekananda’s statements about Indian art and his more extensive theorizing about the Hindu religious tradition.’ In effect, the intention is to ‘provide another perspective on Vivekananda’s position within late nineteenth-century Hinduism, and more particularly within the intensive interaction between Indian and Western intellectual, religious and aesthetic traditions, which provided the backdrop to his mission and which to some extent he consciously mediated’ (214–5). We also notice that in studies on the Great Master and Swamiji ‘it is not generally suggested that Vivekananda shared his master’s flair for painting and modelling, an aptitude known to Vivekananda’ (213–14).

The author places Swamiji in the ethos

dominated by art historians and analysts such as Bhupendranath Dutta, Ananda K Coomaraswamy, E B Havell, and Guha-Thakurta who, in their own way, established a distinct identity for Indian art. It is also interesting, says Beckerlegge, that it was Dutta who ‘stated in his biography of his famous brother Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), that the arguments of Havell and Coomaraswamy were anticipated by Vivekananda’s defence of Indian art’ (214). In short, according to Dutta, ‘from the time of Vivekananda, defence of Indian art became part of a more general apologetic advanced on behalf of Hinduism’ (ibid.). It is here that Beckerlegge shows characteristic thoroughness: covering such areas as ‘Vivekananda on art, East and West’ and, more interestingly, ‘Vivekananda and Ravi Varma’ with focus on polemical issues like ‘imitation and degeneration’. Beckerlegge notes that Swamiji’s views on art, if studied carefully, ‘may lead in turn to a fuller appreciation of the complex attitudes [he] brought to his major task as a cultural mediator, recasting Hindu religious ideas and practices’ (ibid.).

*Colonialism, Modernity and Religious Identities* focuses on religious reform movements in South Asia and contains an interesting study on the impact of Ramakrishna Math and Mission on Karnataka’s religious movements. Maruti T Kamble, the author, traces relatively unexplored religious, cultural, and educational terrains which the Master’s mission reflects with its vast sweep and range (126–46). This pioneering study could provide an inspiring example for writers from other South Indian regions to undertake comparable studies.

The themes that emerge from this volume form a core complex of motifs for colonial studies vis-à-vis

religious movements. One major area of interest is the emergence of activism among religious institutions that, by and large, had kept themselves away from such efforts. Even here, Vivekananda's pioneering work is crucial. Hence the significance of Beckerlegge's other full-length studies, especially *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Delhi: Oxford, 2006).

A related theme is covered by Maria Misra, lecturer in modern history at Oxford, in the recent book *Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India since the Great Rebellion*, which claims to be 'a radical new interpretation of India's history since the 1857 rebellion'. The text has a reference to Swamiji which ties in with art and aesthetics—in this context, the aesthetics of the growth of Indian cities. Misra notes that 'the inter-war era presented a complex and potentially destabilizing amalgam of economic, social and political problems which needed urgent intervention'. This intervention was located 'in a group of urban planners'. Particularly influential in this group was Patrick Geddes, 'the father of the British town planning movement'. He was in India in 1916 and 1919 and knew about the emerging 'slum-ridden industrial cities'. In their stead he visualized 'the creation of neo-technic cities which would not only be beautiful but morally improving'.<sup>2</sup> Geddes 'had no time', says Maria Misra, for 'colonial notions of crude westernization, but had fallen under the influence of the late nineteenth-century Hindu mystic, Swami Vivekananda, and the temple towns of the South India which embodied, in his opinion, the essence of Indian spirituality'. This piece of information—though already known—appearing in a recent study points to the need to explore Swamiji's views vis-à-vis art and aesthetics, specially in the context of urbanization.

### **Narrative of Truth and Myth**

Before I look at another study on colonialism and Swamiji, let me record an intriguing appearance that Sri Ramakrishna makes in the context of a gripping narrative enquiring into the nature of re-

ligious phenomena written by Ramchandra Gandhi, a distinguished academic and philosopher. In this text—called 'a narrative of truth and myth'—the protagonist, a professor, and his pupil Muniya, a graduate student in philosophy and a spiritual seeker, wish to evoke Sri Ramakrishna's life in the late nineteenth century in its simple splendour. The author's evocation of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda in this fictional narrative is so vivid that the verbal dimension does the job of an expert painter's brush. For this to happen, in Ramchandra Gandhi's view, 'we must surrender the reins of the chariot of our life to the luminosity of self-realisation, represented by Krishna in the Mahabharata and by this Goddess who stands besides me. She is Sarada, Kali, Ramakrishna's shakti, the Divine Mother. Seek her, if you want to find Ramakrishna'.<sup>3</sup>

Though a narrative, it seems to me significant in terms of its precision and clarity about the philosophical significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life. 'Sri Ramakrishna had traversed', says the teacher to his graduate student, 'a variety of spiritual paths and always arrived at the same goal, the fundamental Upanishadic realization of the non-duality of Atman and Brahman without abandoning the devotional relationship to Kali as the foundation of his spiritual life' (96). 'Rooted in Bhavatarini's Dakshineshvara, Sri Ramakrishna brought the gift of a precious insight into the distinctive feature of Hinduism: its simultaneous espousal of image-worship and advaita, the riotous self-imaging diversity of selfhood and its supreme self-sufficient singularity, the two poles between which can be accommodated all the modes of worship of all religions, including, especially, the worship of the divine as formless but without qualities, which characterises the religious life of Judaism, Islam, Unitarian Christianity, Sikhism, Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj' (ibid.). The narrator then emphasizes the impact of the trio: 'This was the great renewal of self-understanding which Ramakrishna and Sarada and Vivekananda brought to Hinduism, a foundation without which even the struggle for

India's political independence could not have succeeded even to the extent to which it did' (97).

### Fresh Philosophical Narratives

To go back to colonialism, we have an interesting study on Swami Vivekananda in *Enduring Colonialism* by A Raghuramaraju, a professor of philosophy at the University of Hyderabad. The book examines, in the main, why there has been 'no new philosophical text or system in India since the last few centuries while there were several in the past'.<sup>4</sup> A related area of enquiry is the relevance of philosophical systems of the past—whether their critique could lead to a *new* approach crystallizing itself into new texts and corresponding traditions.

It is in this context that Swamiji figures. Initially, Raghuramaraju notes that the contributions of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo have to be looked at from the perspective of 'the reappropriations'—a term suggested by Sheldon Pollock—of philosophical systems 'articulated in English'. Both Aurobindo and Vivekananda 'broke open from the region-specific vernacular medium and reached wider audiences'. This radical step, says Raghuramaraju, led to original works by many later Indian philosophers: 'It is this change into English and setting new terms and terminology for incorporations from tradition that form the background to Krishnachandra Bhattacharya and other modern Indian philosophers.' There is, therefore, 'a need to recognize the underlying cumulative philosophical progress in their writings' (12).

For this, Raghuramaraju says, 'we need to go back to the writings of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo'. This point is often overlooked mainly because of the exclusive attention given to Gandhi: 'Gandhi may have provided the ideological basis as well as attempted to bring the masses within the mainstream of political process, but his predecessors had already made a claim to bring the masses into the mainstream of political discourse' (ibid.). Citing extremely relevant passages, Raghuramaraju says that Swamiji 'embarked on an internal criticism which held a certain kind of Hinduism re-

sponsible for the poor condition of the masses' (13). Raghuramaraju's insights open up some distinctions in Swamiji's distinguished contributions to the discourse of tradition and modernity as well as the balance between materialism and spirituality.<sup>5</sup> As already noted, this raises the question of language in philosophical discourse. Are there risks in the choice of English to 'transplant' Indian philosophical thought? I am sure that part of Swamiji's immense appeal—particularly in his exposition of the yogas—lies in the clear and cogent English. But, it would be interesting to explore if in the process a *new system* or discourse surfaces and whether this contemporizes the tradition or misses the nuances of the original language.


Raghuramaraju draws attention to another very topical issue: Swamiji's perception of the role of Islam. He 'acknowledges', says Raghuramaraju, 'the role of Mohammedan conquest of India in providing salvation to the poor', and cites Swamiji: 'Even to the Mohammedan Rule we owe that great blessing, the destruction of exclusive privilege. ... The Mohammedan conquest of India came as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor' (23–4).

Colonialism and resistance to it have thus given crucial contexts for assertion of one's cultural roots: 'The remarkable feature of thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Krishnachandra Bhattacharya and others like them is that their attempt is informed by contemporary political matrix, dominated as it were by colonialism and the anti-colonial struggle' (15).

### Re-envisioning the West

So far we have seen Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta in the context of art, aesthetics, colonial discourse, and philosophical narratives. These revealed interesting facets which would certainly surprise those who think of religion and spirituality as areas transcending material concerns. Particularly significant is the political discourse in colonial and postcolonial studies. This is a pointer to new perspectives in which religious studies can no longer remain glued to being 'religious' alone.

Another perspective is provided briefly but brilliantly by Sunil Khilnani, in his book *The Idea of India*. Discussing the advent of modernity in India, Khilnani, a fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, explores the attitudes of Tagore, Nehru, and others to modernity. It is here that Vivekananda figures as a nationalist. Khilnani says: 'Unlike many other nationalists who had come to a sense of Indian-ness through the detour of the West, there is no trace in Nehru of that inwardly turned rage of an Aurobindo or Vivekananda, political intellectuals who strove to purge themselves of what they came to regard as a defiling encounter with the modern West—an encounter that had in the first place planted in them the urge to be Indian.'<sup>6</sup> Though one may not agree with the idea of 'defiling encounter', Khilnani's description of Swamiji as a 'political intellectual' is intriguing. Perhaps, this hints at the way analysts and political ideologues are generally prone to claiming Swamiji for their own political ambitions even as it suggests an inadequate understanding of Swamiji's nuanced position on the

author's part. Far from nursing a rage against the alleged defilement from the West, Swami Vivekananda consistently raged against the agonizing poverty and deprivation of the Indian masses. And he urged the adoption of Western science, technology, and social activism. However, this perspective needs cautious exploration. 

### Notes and References

1. Beckerlegge's paper is part of *Colonialism, Modernity and Religious Identities: Religious Reform Movements in South Asia*, ed. Gwilym Beckerlegge (Delhi: Oxford, 2008).
2. Maria Misra, *Vishnu's Crowded Temple: India since the Great Rebellion* (Penguin, 2007), 118.
3. Ramchandra Gandhi, *Muniya's Light: A Narrative of Truth and Myth* (New Delhi: India Ink/Roli, 2005), 95.
4. A Raghuramaraju, *Enduring Colonialism: Classical Presences and Modern Absences in Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Oxford, 2009), ix.
5. Here, I must confess, I am not happy with Raghuramaraju's use of the term 'spiritualism'.
6. Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1999), 170–1.

## Swami Vivekananda on Art

His [Swami Vivekananda's] assessment of Europe's other cultural artifacts is generally marked by admiration and at times an acceptance of values alien to the Indian tradition. This is particularly true of his approach to the fine arts, even though his views on the subject are not free from contradictions. He appreciated the aesthetic sensibility expressed in western lifestyle and regretted its disappearance from the Indian art of living. He admired the western art collectors, but of course the poverty-stricken Indians could not emulate them. He conceded unquestioned superiority to the traditions of painting and sculpture in Europe and added, 'we have always been incompetent in these two fields', citing the examples of the images of the deities as well as Ravi Varma's paintings. Interestingly, he saw some merit in the art of the Bengali *patua* and the gilded paintings of Rajasthan. His sensibilities rejected soulless decoration—the flowery exaggeration of later Sanskrit literature as well as

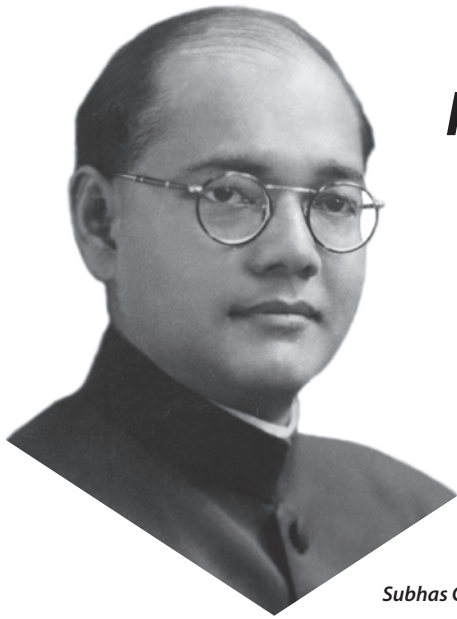
the baroque exuberance of Indian temple sculpture. ...

Every culture had its distinctive 'character' expressed in its social mores as much as in the creative arts. He observed a quality of pointed sharpness in Europe's artistic expression. They threw their hands and legs about when they danced, their instrumental and vocal music reminded him of the bayonet's thrusts. Dance and music in India had by contrast a rounded quality, rising and melting like waves. ...

The best in European art conveyed the feeling of a true segment from nature. The best products of Indian sculpture carried one beyond nature to an ideal world. In the last analysis, he found nothing anywhere else in the world which could be compared with the best in Buddhist sculpture. The statement may express an actual preference natural in a sensitive mystic. But perhaps cultural self-assertion is not entirely absent from it.

—Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, 291–2





Subhas Chandra Bose

# Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: Vision and Values

Dr Anil Baran Ray

**T**HAT NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE contributed a heroic model to India's struggle for freedom is a well-known fact. What is not so well known or not so well appreciated is that Bose, the hero, was also a visionary who charted a future course for India with vision and values that remain relevant even today. The present article dwells on this aspect of his political philosophy, reflecting in the process on what he considered valuable in fascism and socialism and discussing the philosophy of *samyavad* that he weaved out of such values.

## Bose and Fascism

Many analysts did not take kindly to Bose's association with Germany, Italy, and Japan, though such association was in the interest of India's freedom from the British. His fascist connections provoked the charge that he was in sympathy with the fascist ideology and that perhaps he was a fascist himself. Since this charge continues to be levelled against Bose to this day, it should be judged not in isolation, but in the context of the political circumstances prevailing in his time. The charge is misplaced for the simple reason that the fascist ideology had nothing to do with Bose's looking out for fascist allies. He was driven by *realpolitik*. The British were his main enemy. He could not fight them effectively

within the country because he was blocked both by the Congress policy of non-cooperation with him and the British policy of repressing him. Under these circumstances, he decided that if he could not carry forward his mission within India, he must join forces with foreign powers that were against the British. It was a practical move which had little connection with ideological issues. Ending British rule in India was Bose's avowed aim. Since he lacked the means to do it himself, he ventured to gather forces by allying with the enemies of the British.

Bose admired strength. He firmly believed that a leader should be strong and resolute. He expressed his admiration for Mussolini not so much for his fascist ideology but because he was a strong leader. Bose's admiration for strength, however, led him to certain opinions in which his critics saw signs of fascism. For instance, after quitting the Congress in 1939 and having formed his new party, Forward Bloc, he declared that this party would follow neither the Victorian English democracy nor the bourgeois French democracy of the nineteenth century. Instead, it would work for a 'government by a strong party bound together by military discipline'.<sup>1</sup> In a different context he said that 'for a few years at least after the end of the British rule in India there must be a dictatorship. No other constitution can flourish in the country. And it is to India's good that she should be ruled by a dictator to begin with.'<sup>2</sup> And yet it is the same man who observed in his book *The Indian Struggle (1935-1942)* that, 'Free India will not be a land of capitalists, landlords, and castes. Free India will be a social and political democracy.'<sup>3</sup>

These varying opinions of Bose, put in perspective, lead to the following observations:

(i) Bose did not want free India to be a democracy of the English or French type.

(ii) Instead, he wanted India to be a democracy in her own right and believed that ridding India of capitalism, landlordism, and casteism would turn her into a genuine social and political democracy.

(iii) In spite of his conviction about turning India into a genuine social and political democracy, he felt that there was a case for placing the country under the governance of a strong and militarily disciplined party or even under a dictatorship for a few years following independence.

The last-mentioned opinion gave rise to the criticism that Bose had fascist leanings or that Bose was a fascist dictator himself. The following, then, is the crucial question: Why did Bose have such an opinion? The answer has to be sought in the circumstances of those time. Portents of World War II were in the air and all-round chaos prevailed in India with as many as three protagonists—the British, the Congress, and the non-Congress parties such as the newly emerged Forward Bloc—contributing to the situation. In such circumstances Bose reasoned that a government by a strong party with military discipline or by a dictator was the only means of holding the country together. The British had created so many dissensions and political rifts in India that he believed only a dictator of the Kemal Pasha type could save the future independent India from disorder and disruption.<sup>4</sup>

That Bose's fascistic leanings were more circumstantial than integral to his political ideology can be judged from two facts: (i) his disowning of certain features of fascism, and (ii) his espousal of socialism for the future independent India.

First, fascism is right-wing authoritarianism that historically indulged in imperialist expansion as well. Bose, by his own admission, was a leftist with the first and foremost aim of destruction of British imperialism in India; he never supported the imperialistic expansionism of fascism. Circumstances compelled him to seek Japanese help to fight British imperialism. All the same, Bose was critical of Japan's role in the Far East.<sup>5</sup> His anti-imperialistic

stance, which was at once a rejection of right-wing authoritarianism-cum-imperialism of fascism, comes through clearly in the following observations he made at Ramgarh:

A word is necessary here in order to explain what we mean by Leftism. The present age is the anti-imperialist phase of our movement. Our main task in this age is to end Imperialism and win national Independence for the Indian people. When freedom comes, the age of national reconstruction will commence and that will be the socialist phase of our movement. In the present phase of our movement, Leftists will be those who will wage an uncompromising fight with Imperialism. Those who waver and vacillate in their struggle against Imperialism, those who tend towards a compromise with it, cannot by any means be Leftists. In the next phase of our movement, Leftism will be synonymous with Socialism, but in the present phase, the words 'Leftist' and 'Anti-imperialist' should be interchangeable.<sup>6</sup>

Second, fascism stands for racism. It upholds the superiority of the Aryans over all other races. Subhas Bose detested racism so deeply that when he met Hitler for the first time in Germany in order to elicit his support in the form of a declaration in favour of India's independence, he did not hesitate to register his protest against the racial slur that Hitler cast on Indians in *Mein Kampf*, going to the extent of demanding that the offending portion be deleted in the next edition of the book. This was not Bose's first protest against racism. When he was a graduate student in arts at Presidency College, Calcutta, he led fellow students in a protest against Professor E F Oaten's derogatory remarks against Indians. To Bose, imperialism and racism went hand in hand, and he advocated in their place internationalism and the equality of races and peoples across the globe.

Third, fascism stands for a hierarchical society in which an elite group of leaders, drawn from the exploiting and dominant classes, rule over the masses. Bose's political ideology was to evolve a non-feudalist, non-capitalist, exploitation-free, egalitarian society in India which would be par-

ticularly protective of the interests of peasants and workers. He did not believe in the right of the elite to exploit the masses in the name of governance.

Fourth, fascism worships the state. Bose regarded the state only as an instrument for serving the masses. To him, the state was only a means, not an end in itself.

Fifth, fascism totally subordinates the individual to the state. A secret police and a subservient judiciary come handy to the state in this regard. Bose never advocated complete subordination of the individual to the state.

To sum up, Subhas Bose rejected the basic tenets of fascism except for strong leadership and a disciplined single-party system. He admired these, as did the fascists; however, the objective of his admiration was different from those of the fascists. He never gave primacy to the will of a leader over the interests of the masses; nor did he suggest that a strong leader or a handful of such leaders could use the state machinery to dominate over and exploit the masses. He wanted a strong man at the helm of free India and a disciplined single-party system for the country only because he believed that they were necessary for a few years after independence in the interest of extricating India from chaos and confusion into which the British had landed her. A strong leader and a disciplined single-party system were Bose's means of uplifting the country. However, both these means, Bose insisted, must be committed to the socialist cause and must work for the implementation of the chosen socialist programme.

### **Bose and Socialism**

Bose was not an orthodox Marxian socialist. He was interested only in following those features of socialism which he considered to be appropriate for India, and to that end he meant to pursue only a select socialist programme. As the president of the Indian National Congress at the Haripura session of 1938, he drew up a programme towards the pursuit of socialism with the eventual goal of establishing a socialist state in free India.<sup>7</sup> The salient features of his chosen socialist programme were the following:

(i) Feudalism must be brought to an end in India. Bose proposed abolition of landlordism in the form of the zamindari system prevalent in the then India and in its place advocated the introduction of a land tenure system to be followed uniformly all over the country.

(ii) Capitalism also must cease in India. To this end he suggested bringing agriculture and industry under state ownership and introducing the cooperative system in these areas for both production and distribution. He believed that a sound system of planning would help him reorganize the agricultural and industrial life of the country and he, as the president of the Indian National Congress, appointed the National Planning Committee with Jawaharlal Nehru as its chairman to draft a suitable plan of action.

(iii) There must be improvement in the material standard of living of the masses. The practice of borrowing money at exorbitant rates of interest from money-lending *mahajans*, usurers, was a major cause of rural indebtedness in India. Bose wanted this important cause of poverty to be removed forthwith by making provision for cheap credit to rural people.

The guiding principles that Bose formulated in January 1941 for the newly founded Forward Bloc gives us further insight into his ideas on socialism as far as India was concerned. Unlike Mahatma Gandhi, who believed in the economic regeneration of the country through cottage industries and the use of small machinery, Bose advocated to the same end large-scale industrial production based on scientific principles. Apart from social ownership and control of both production and distribution, he wanted to ensure the following in free India:

(i) Equal rights for every individual.

(ii) Freedom of the individual in matters of religious worship.

(iii) Linguistic and cultural autonomy for all sections of Indian society.

(iv) Equality and social justice for all Indians through the abolition of social inequities which sprang from caste barriers, communalism, and religious intolerance.<sup>8</sup>

Bose did not take Marxism as a model for his socialist programme in India. He thought that Marxism was deficient on two counts from the point of view of India's age-old tradition and heritage. First, Marxism's materialistic orientation could not appeal to Indians, as most Indians with their belief in religion and spirituality could not take to the materialistic dialectic of Marxism spontaneously or wholeheartedly. Bose went to the length of saying that Vivekananda's concept of socialism as service to the poor had better appeal for Indians than Marxism.<sup>9</sup> Second, Bose believed that the revolutionary tenets of Marxism, with concepts like class struggle, also could not appeal to Indians.

Bose thought that in an independent India the state could play a role in bringing about social transformation without bloodshed. The state had to work as an organ of the masses to ensure their material well-being as also to satisfy their need for equality and freedom. In assigning such a role to the state, Bose thought, much like Vivekananda, that without first fulfilling the material needs of the masses one could not expect them to have spiritual fulfilment. Bose regarded materiality and spirituality as being complementary to each other and treated socialism in the same vein—as being both material and spiritual in nature. According to him, socialism was a way of so arranging material relationships that they could ensure the material and spiritual well-being of every member of society. He viewed state ownership of material resources and the equality of distribution of such resources as a pre-requisite for the spiritualization of social life in a poor country like India. He differed with Marx in this regard. Marx regarded matter as the cosmos in itself. Bose treated matter as only an aspect of the cosmos. To him, socialism is worth its name only when it is inspired by the spirit underlying the being of man (62).

In treating socialism as both spiritual and material in nature, Bose accomplished two things simultaneously. He infused his personal spiritual idealism into the state policy of social and economic reconstruction and also upheld India's right

to evolve her own mode of socialism in accordance with the spiritual motif of her national life.

### **Bose and Samyavad**

Predominantly a socialist with the conviction that every country had the right to pursue socialism in its own way, Bose conceptualized a political ideology that he termed *samyavad*. Many people thought that it was a mere summation of the principles of fascism and communism. This it was not; rather, it was an independent ideology woven out of a combination of values such as strength, discipline, nationalism, and equality. Fascism also espoused the first three values, but while Bose used them positively for the purpose of nation-building in India, the fascist powers of his time used them negatively for promoting racism and imperialism. Through strength, discipline, and nationalism, Bose wanted to ensure a vigorous national life for India. Through equality, the cardinal principle of socialism and communism, he wanted to ensure in equal measure, material and spiritual freedom, distributive justice, and equal rights for all Indians.

In Bose's conception of *samyavad*, the Indian state could not go overboard in the use of its power to pursue these values because such power would be balanced by spiritualization of life. Political process would be balanced by the social process. Public accountability of the state would issue from such a balance. We wish we had more details from Bose on his ideology of *samyavad*, but that was not to be, as destiny deprived him of the opportunity to work out this ideology in independent India.

In sum, Bose had a great objective behind the formulation of the ideology of *samyavad*: to do away with the inequality of wealth, status, and opportunity and to infuse strength, vigour, and dynamism into India as a nation. Undoubtedly, to boldly pursue the ideals of equality and freedom in the national and international spheres of today's world the country should have the following:

(Continued on page 206)



# Maya: A Bhagavadgita Perspective

Dr D Nirmala Devi

THE BHAGAVADGITA is one of the three recognized textual authorities, *prasthāna-traya*—on Vedānta, the other being the Upanishads and the *Brahma Sutra*. The Vedantic ideas of the Gita are coloured by the ideas of the Sāṅkhya and Yoga schools, and the peculiar synthetic character of its philosophy is the outcome of this colouring. The concept of maya in the Gita highlights this synthesis.

## The Meaning of Maya

The term ‘maya’ is used in the Rig Veda to denote the power that borders on the magical: ‘*Indro māyābhiḥ pururūpa īyate*; Indra, through the help of maya, assumes different forms.’<sup>1</sup> In the Upanishads the word acquires a philosophical significance. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* announces: ‘Know that Prakṛiti, Nature, is surely maya, and that Maheshwara, the Mighty Lord, is the maker of maya.’<sup>2</sup> Krishna says in the Gita: ‘This divine maya of mine, consisting of the modes [*guṇas*] is hard to overcome. But those who take refuge in me alone cross beyond it.’<sup>3</sup>

Shankaracharya speaks of maya as the power of the Lord, beginningless and compounded of the three *guṇas*. Though imperceptible, maya can be inferred from the effects it produces. It is ‘something positive, though intangible, which cannot be described as either being or non-being, which is made of three qualities and is antagonistic to knowledge.’<sup>4</sup> Maya is said to be indefinable because it cannot be described either as being or as non-being. If it were being in the truest sense, then its effect, the tangible universe, would be perceived at all times; for being can never become non-being, the real can never become unreal. But sages report that one does not behold the universe in samādhi or while one is in communion with Brahman, and its absence in dreamless sleep is a universal experience. On the other hand, if maya

were non-being, a non-existent unreality, like ‘the son of a barren woman’, then the universe would not have been manifested at any time. One could not have apprehended the world of names and forms as real. Therefore, maya is said to be ‘something positive’.

The qualifier ‘something’ denotes insubstantiality; in comparison to Brahman, its substratum, the world is both insubstantial and devoid of intrinsic worth. The word ‘positive’ reminds us that it is capable of being apprehended through the senses. It also serves the purpose of removing the erroneous notion that maya or ignorance is purely a negative entity, the absence of knowledge, because both maya and its effect, the material universe, disappear when one attains the knowledge of Brahman. Brahman and maya cannot coexist any more than the Absolute and the relative, the one and the many. When one of them is apprehended, the other appears to be non-existent. They cannot even be described as correlative entities. That is why the oft-asked question ‘how the Absolute becomes this world of relatives’ is illogical and, therefore, meaningless.

## Maya and the World of Change

Maya, says Shankara, is not only universal but also beginningless. A distinction must, however, be made between maya as a universal principle and *avidyā*, ignorance, which is individual. Individual ignorance is beginningless but it can end at any moment: it disappears when a person achieves spiritual illumination. Thus, the world may vanish from the consciousness of an individual and yet continues to exist for the rest of humankind. In this respect Shankara’s philosophy is essentially different from subjective idealism.

Things come into existence and then disintegrate in a short while. We cannot say that they do not exist. They exist only for a short span of time.

Vedanta reminds us that 'infinity' existed before these objects made their appearance, and it will continue to exist after they disappear. Thus the world of change is an order that has its contingent rise and fall in the Absolute. According to the Gita, the changing world is but an appearance. Maya is this principle of change. S Radhakrishnan says:

If the fundamental form of the Supreme is *nirguṇa*, quality-less, and *acintya*, inconceivable, the world is an appearance which cannot be logically related to the Absolute. In the unalterable eternity of Brahman, all that moves and evolves is founded. By It they exist, they cannot be without It, though it causes nothing, does nothing, determines nothing. While the world is dependent on Brahman, the latter is not dependent on the world. This one-sided dependence and the logical inconceivability of the relation between the Ultimate Reality and the world are brought out by the word 'māyā'.<sup>5</sup>

Ishvara is the meeting point of the mutable and immutable realms. Maya is the principle of change and mutation. It is eternal becoming and is dependent on Ishvara. Ishvara fashions the universe through his creative power. That creative power is known as *yoga-māyā*, and for wielding this power, God is known as *māyin*. The forces, events, and objects produced by maya under the supervision of the *māyin* are transient, and therefore only apparent or 'illusory'. Maya is also said to be the source of *moha*, delusion: 'Deluded by these threefold modes of nature (*guṇas*), this whole world does not recognize Me who am above them and imperishable' (217).

It is due to the play of maya that we have only partial consciousness—the real being of Ishvara is veiled from us by the play of Prakriti and its modes. We have to pierce the forces of maya and go behind the veil of Prakriti to find Reality: 'The world and its changes constitute the self-concealment of God (*tirodhāna*) or obscuring of the Creator by His creation. ... God seems to be the great deceiver as He creates the world and its sense objects and turns our senses outward' (41). The *Katha Upanishad* explicitly emphasizes this point: 'The self-existent Lord destroyed the outgoing senses. Therefore, one

sees the outer things and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating person, desiring immortality, turns one's gaze away and sees the indwelling Self.'<sup>6</sup>

The whole cosmic process is the work of the Supreme Being. He works on Prakriti, which is conceived of as a positive entity because it has the power of resistance. The Gita emphasizes the immanence of Ishvara, who embraces the world of finite souls and nature: 'By Me all this universe is pervaded through My unmanifest form. All beings abide in Me but I do not abide in them.'<sup>7</sup>

The Gita declares that Purusha is *kṣetrajña*, the knower of the field, while Prakriti comprises the full range of objects that fall within the purview of knowledge. It establishes only an epistemological relation between the two. One is the knower and the other the known. Prakriti is matter and Purusha consciousness. They are the lower and higher natures of Ishvara: 'This [Prakriti] is My lower nature. Know my other and higher nature which is the soul, by which this world is upheld' (214). The birth of all beings follows this combination of matter and spirit: 'Whatever forms are produced in any wombs whatsoever, O son of Kuntī (Arjuna), great brahma is their womb and I am the Father who casts the seed' (315). Radhakrishnan asserts that when the whole world is freed from bondage, is lifted into a higher realm, and is completely illumined, the purpose of the Supreme is realized. The world is then restored to its origin in pure Being, beyond all distinctions. This, in Vedanta, is absolute dissolution of the world: *ātyantika pralaya*. It is 'the liberation of all consequent on the realization of Brahman'.<sup>8</sup>


The Absolute Being, the one Godhead, is the first cause behind and beyond the world. The world represents the 'strife between being and non-being in the process of becoming'. 'The first product of the interaction is the cosmic egg (*brahmāṇḍa*) which includes within itself the totality of manifested being. All later developments are contained within it in a germinal form. It contains the past, the present and the future in a supreme now.'<sup>9</sup> Ishvara is the meeting point of the principles of mutation and immutability: 'I give heat; I withhold

and send forth the rain, I am immortality and also death. I am being as well as non-being' (246).

The word 'maya' has multiple connotations in the Gita:

The personal Īśvara is said to combine within Himself, sat and asat, the immutability of Brahman as well as the mutation of becoming. Māyā is the power which enables him to produce mutable nature. It is the śakti or energy of Īśvara, or *ātmavibhūti*, the power of self-becoming. ... Since the Lord is able to produce the universe by means of the two elements of His being, prakṛti and puruṣa, matter and consciousness, they are said to be māyā (higher and lower) of God. ... Gradually, māyā comes to mean the lower prakṛti, since puruṣa is said to be the seed which the Lord casts into the womb of prakṛti for the generation of the universe. ... By regarding it [the world] as a mere mechanical determination of nature unrelated to God, we fail to perceive its Divine essence. It then becomes a source of delusion. The Divine māyā becomes *avidyāmāyā*. It is so, however, only for us mortals, shut off from the truth; to God who knows all and controls it, it is *vidyāmāyā*. God seems to be enveloped in the immense cloak of māyā (42).

Nature is cyclic in action. When at rest it is called 'the unmanifest'; when it moves, diversity makes its appearance. The whole process has been likened to the alternations of day and night, albeit of the Creator, Brahma: 'At the coming of day, all manifested things come forth from the unmanifested and at the coming of night they merge in the same' (233).


As the manifested world hides the Real from the vision of mortals, it is said to be delusive in character. 'Since the world is only an effect of God, who is the cause and since everywhere the cause is more real than the effect, the world as effect is said to be less real than God the cause. This reality and unreality of the world is confirmed by the self-contradictory nature of the process of becoming' (42-3). Grasping this ambivalence is the key to apprehending the nature of maya. 

## References

1. Rig Veda, 6.47.18.

2. See *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, trans, Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), 4.9.10.
3. S Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavatgītā* (Bombay: Blackie & Son, 1970), 218.
4. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vedānta-sāra of Sadānanda* (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1987), 22.
5. *The Bhagavadgītā*, 37-8.
6. See *Eight Upaniṣads*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 1.180.
7. *The Bhagavatgītā*, 238.
8. *Vedānta Paribhāṣa*, trans. and annot. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 173.
9. *The Bhagavatgītā*, 40.

(Continued from page 186)

'Hold fast, this is most necessary in America. Forget your past, your customs, and your ideals. Select a goal and pursue it with all your might. No matter what happens to you, hold on. You will experience a bad time, but sooner or later you will achieve your goal.'<sup>10</sup> This, curiously, is a close echo of Swami Vivekananda's clarion call: 'Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!' In the US he saw this call literally translated into reality. 

## References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.483.
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7. Joseph R Conlin, *The American Past: A Survey of American History* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1993), 479-80.
8. *New Discoveries*, 5.108-9.
9. *Complete Works*, 1.387.
10. *The American Past*, 475.

# Four Basic Principles of Advaita Vedanta

Swami Bhajanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

## Ajñāna as the Conjoint Cause of the World

MAYA OR AJÑĀNA OR AVIDYĀ or ignorance is regarded in almost all schools of thought as absence of knowledge, inadequate knowledge, or wrong knowledge. The Advaita view of *ajñāna* differs from all other views in three ways:

(i) *Ajñāna* is not merely a psychological process taking place in a person's mind, but a universal, ontological phenomenon present everywhere.

(ii) *Ajñāna* is an *adhyāsa* or *adhyāropa*, superimposition. Reality is of the nature of knowledge, and *ajñāna* is a veiling or covering of knowledge.

(iii) *Ajñāna* is not mere negation; it is something positive, *bhāvarūpa*. The countless objects of the universe are not mere illusions, they are real as long as the empirical world remains. They are all produced by *maya*. This shows that *maya* is something positive.

When it is said that Brahman is both material cause, *upādāna-kāraṇa*, and efficient cause, *nimitta-kāraṇa*, it only means that Brahman is the unchanging non-dual Reality behind the universe. The varieties of forms and names that we encounter in the world are the creations of *maya*. The exact relation between Brahman and *maya* is a matter of controversy among the different schools of Advaita. The more popular view is that Brahman and *maya* act like the two strands of a rope. In this case, the role of *maya* is known as a *sahakāri-kāraṇa*, conjoint cause or cooperative cause.<sup>14</sup>

*Maya* or *ajñāna* is said to have two powers: (i) *āvaraṇa-śakti*, which covers Brahman and prevents Brahman's true nature from being known; and (ii) *vikṣepa-śakti*, which conjures up the objects of the universe.<sup>15</sup>

From the above it is clear that, functionally, *maya* or *ajñāna* is as real as the Prakṛiti of Sāṅkhya philosophy and the Shakti of Shaktism. At the same time, since *ajñāna* is a negative factor and is itself illusory, it can be eliminated or sublated through true knowledge, leaving the non-dual nature of Brahman intact. This brilliant stroke of the intellect executed by Śaṅkara has few parallels in the history of philosophy.

But this concept involves certain contradictions. In the first place, if Brahman is self-luminous and is nothing but pure knowledge, how can ignorance exist in it? Can darkness exist in light? Secondly, since Brahman is infinite, *ajñāna* must be infinite too. In that case, realization of Brahman by one person would imply the removal of the entire *ajñāna* in the universe, which is obviously an absurd proposition. Although attempts have been made to answer these and other objections, none of them is satisfactory.

*Ajñāna* or *avidyā* is of two kinds: *kāraṇa-ajñāna*, also called *mūlāvidyā*, and *kārya-ajñāna*, also called *tūlāvidyā*. It is *kāraṇa-ajñāna* that is the cause of the creation of all the manifold things in the universe, including the ego—this is known as *īśvara-sṛṣṭi*, God's creation. Our attachment, hatred, fear, dreams, and such other reactions with regard to external objects are produced by *kārya-ajñāna*—this is known as *jīva-sṛṣṭi*.<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, we have already pointed out that in Advaita, *ajñāna* means *adhyāsa* or *adhyāropa*. *Adhyāsa* itself is of five types, which are polar in nature (see Table I).

To have a clear understanding of Advaita it is necessary to understand first these five polarities in *adhyāsa*.<sup>17</sup> Owing to limitations of space they cannot be discussed here.



Table I

<i>Dharmī-adhyāsa</i> (Substantive superimposition)	vs	<i>Dharma-adhyāsa</i> (Attributive superimposition)
<i>Anyonya-adhyāsa</i> (Mutual superimposition)	vs	<i>Ekonmukha-adhyāsa</i> (Unilateral superimposition)
<i>Tādātmya-adhyāsa</i> (Identification superimposition)	vs	<i>Saṁsarga-adhyāsa</i> (Contact superimposition)
<i>Kāraṇa-adhyāsa</i> (Causal superimposition)	vs	<i>Kārya-adhyāsa</i> (Effect superimposition)
<i>Artha-adhyāsa</i> (Object superimposition)	vs	<i>Jñāna-adhyāsa</i> (Knowledge superimposition)

### The Non-duality of Knowledge

One of the most fundamental ideas of Vedānta is that pure Consciousness, *cit*, or pure knowledge, *jñāna*, is self-existent; that is, it exists by itself, independent of body and mind. This idea is shared by the Sāṅkhya and Yoga systems also, but by no other system of thought in the world. In Western thought—religious as well as secular—consciousness or knowledge has always been regarded as a property or function of mind, or even of the brain, and can never exist independently.

Advaita Vedānta advanced the idea of the independence and self-existence of consciousness still further—more than Sāṅkhya and Yoga ever did—and posited that pure Knowledge or Consciousness is one and non-dual. It is to be remembered here that ‘Advaita’ does not mean mere oneness of reality. Several Western thinkers, from Parmenides and Aristotle in ancient Greece to modern quantum physicists, have spoken about oneness of reality, but it is invariably oneness of either matter or mind, or else of ‘substance’, which is a *tertium quid*. Advaita alone speaks of the oneness of Consciousness or Knowledge. According to it, Consciousness is the sole Reality.

Now, knowledge or consciousness is of two main kinds: Self-knowledge, *ātma-jñāna*, and objective knowledge, *viśaya-jñāna*.

**Ātma-jñāna, Self-knowledge** • This, again, is of two kinds: *astitva-jñāna* and *svarūpa-jñāna*.

(i) *Astitva-jñāna*, knowledge of one’s existence. If Atman and Brahman were completely hidden by *ajñāna*, then we would know nothing about our own existence or about other things, and we would be no better than a stone or a clod of earth. But, like the light of the sun coming through dark

clouds, the light of the Atman comes through the coverings of *ajñāna*. It is this filtered light of Atman that gives us the notion ‘I exist’. My own existence, *astitva*, does not need any proof; it is self-evident, *svataḥ-siddha*. This awareness of our own existence comes from the Atman in us.

It should be mentioned here that the ‘I’ or ego in us is the result of the association of the Atman, which is *cit* or pure Consciousness, and *buddhi*, which is *jaḍa* or *ajñāna*. This association is conceived as a ‘knot’, *cit-jaḍa-granthi*, or as a red-hot iron ball—fire stands for the Atman, the iron ball for *buddhi*—or as a transparent crystal appearing as red owing to the presence of a red flower near it. When we say ‘I exist’, the ‘exist’ aspect comes directly from the Atman.

(ii) *Svarūpa-jñāna*, knowledge of one’s true nature. What is the nature of this Atman? Unfortunately we are aware of only the existence of the Atman but, owing to the covering of *kāraṇa-ajñāna*, we are not aware of its true nature, *svarūpa*. According to Śaṅkara, the true nature of the Atman can be known only from Vedāntic scriptures. The Upanishads state that the true nature of Atman is Brahman. This kind of knowledge is at first only a conceptual knowledge produced by mental *vṛttis*, modifications. But this *vṛtti-jñāna* is the starting point. According to Śaṅkara, once this knowledge is gained, all that remains to be done is to stop identifying oneself with one’s body, mind, and so on. This non-identification, practised with the help of the ‘*neti, neti*’ process, begins as *dyg-dṛśya-viveka*—discrimination between the seer and the seen—and culminates in a higher type of inner absorption, known as *nididhyāsana*. Sureswaracharya equates *nididhyāsana* with

*savikalpa samādhi*. Beyond this lies *nirvikalpa samādhi*, in which *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, a unitary mental mode, removes the *mūlāvidyā*, causal ignorance. When the *mūlāvidyā* is completely removed, the Atman is realized as Brahman. When this happens, *astitva-jñāna* is replaced by *svarūpa-jñāna*.

The popular notion that in Advaitic experience the Atman ‘merges’ into Brahman is not quite true. The Atman remains as self-existence. Owing to the coverings of *ajñāna* and its products, the Atman is at first experienced as ‘I exist’. But as the coverings are removed, the Atman’s self-existence expands until it becomes infinite. The same Atman that was at the beginning remains at the end also, only its coverings are gone; we then call it Brahman.

**Viśaya-jñāna, Objective Knowledge** • We have already seen that the light of the Atman, in spite of being covered by *ajñāna*, still shines forth, giving rise to the notion of ‘I’. The same filtered light of the Atman, when directed towards the objects, reveals them. This is how we see objects. The *Mundaka Upanishad* states: ‘*Tasya bhāsā sarvam-idaṁ vibhāti*; by His light all this shines.’

Although the Upanishads speak of the light of the Atman revealing objects, according to the epistemology or theory of knowledge developed by the Sankhya, Yoga, and Vedanta systems, the pure Atman by itself cannot have objective knowledge. To have objective knowledge, the light of the Atman must be reflected by a modification of the *antaḥkaraṇa*, inner organ, known as *vṛtti*. The ancient Sankhya-Yoga teacher Panchashikha expressed this principle as an axiom: ‘*Ekameva darśanam khyātireva darśanam*; there is only one way of seeing, *vṛtti-jñāna* is the only way of seeing.’ According to the Sankhya-Yoga theory of perception—briefly described by Vyasa in his commentary on *Yoga Sutra*, 1.7—the *antaḥkaraṇa* goes out through the eyes to the object and takes the form of the object; this modification of the *antaḥkaraṇa* is known as *vṛtti*. The light of the Purusha or the Atman then gets reflected in this *vṛtti*, and this reflected light reveals the object. Thus, *viśaya-jñāna* or objective knowledge is invariably *vṛtti-jñāna*.

The above theory of perception was adopted by Advaitins. Post-Shankara Advaitins, however, added two more processes to those propounded by yoga teachers.

(i) According to the Advaita view, all objects are covered by *ajñāna*, and it is owing to this *ajñāna* that the objects are not seen. Therefore, before the *antaḥkaraṇa* takes the form of the object, it must first remove the *ajñāna* covering the object. It should be noted that this covering *ajñāna* is different from the *kāraṇa-ajñāna* and *kārya-ajñāna* mentioned earlier. It is known simply as *viśayagata-ajñāna*, or as *avasthā-ajñāna*.<sup>18</sup>

(ii) Secondly, Brahman is all-pervading, and so there is *caitanya*, consciousness, not only in the seer or subject, known as *pramāṭṛ-caitanya*, but also in the object seen, known as *viśaya-caitanya* or *prameya-caitanya*. Post-Shankara Advaitins held that, in order to see an object, mere reflection of the light of the Atman on the *vṛtti* is not enough. It is also necessary that *pramāṭṛ-caitanya* and *prameya-caitanya* become unified. This is because true knowledge is non-dual. Therefore, even in ordinary empirical perception there must be unity of the subject and the object.

Thus, the Advaitic theory of perception involves the following mental processes:

(i) Before a person looks at an object, say a cow, the object remains enveloped in *ajñāna*. This ignorance is known as *viśayagata-ajñāna* or *avasthā-ajñāna*.

(ii) When the person directs his gaze towards the object, his *antaḥkaraṇa* issues forth through his eyes and removes the ignorance covering the object. This process is called *āvaraṇa-bhanga*.

(iii) The *antaḥkaraṇa* now takes the form of the object. The resulting modification of the *antaḥkaraṇa* is called a *vṛtti*. At this stage the *antaḥkaraṇa* has three parts or *vṛttis*: a) *pramātā*, the part within the person; b) *pramāṇa*, the part that issues forth; and c) *prameya*, the part that takes the form of the object.

(iv) The *pramāṭṛ-caitanya* in the person extends through the *antaḥkaraṇa*; this extension of consciousness is called *pramāṇa-caitanya* or *cidābhāsa*.

*Cidābhāsa* gets reflected on the *vṛtti*. This 'tainting' of consciousness is called *ciduparāga*.

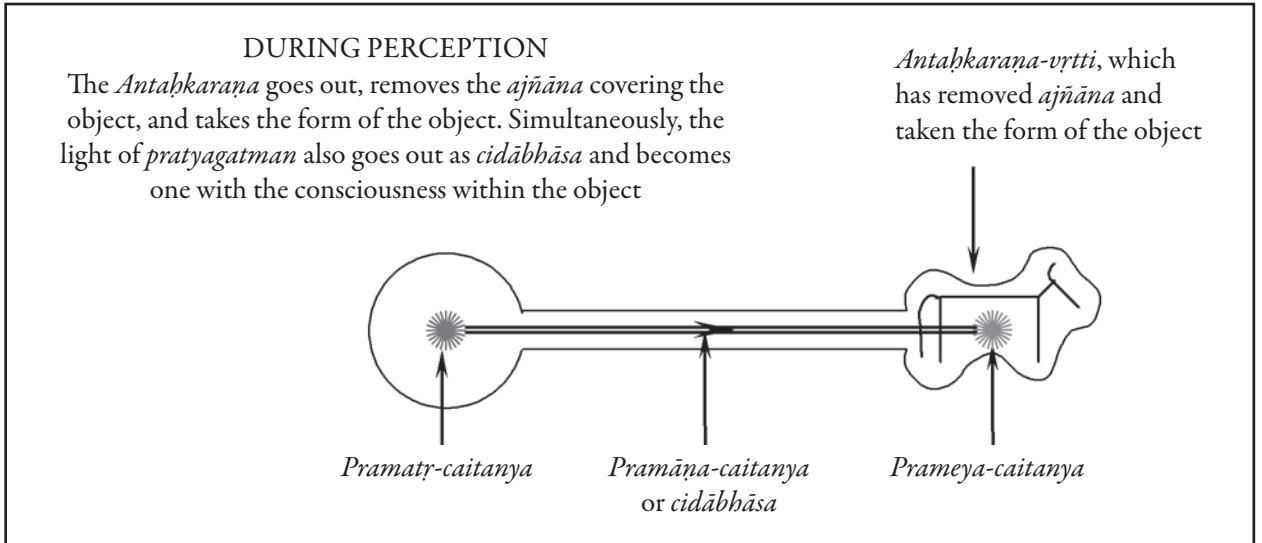
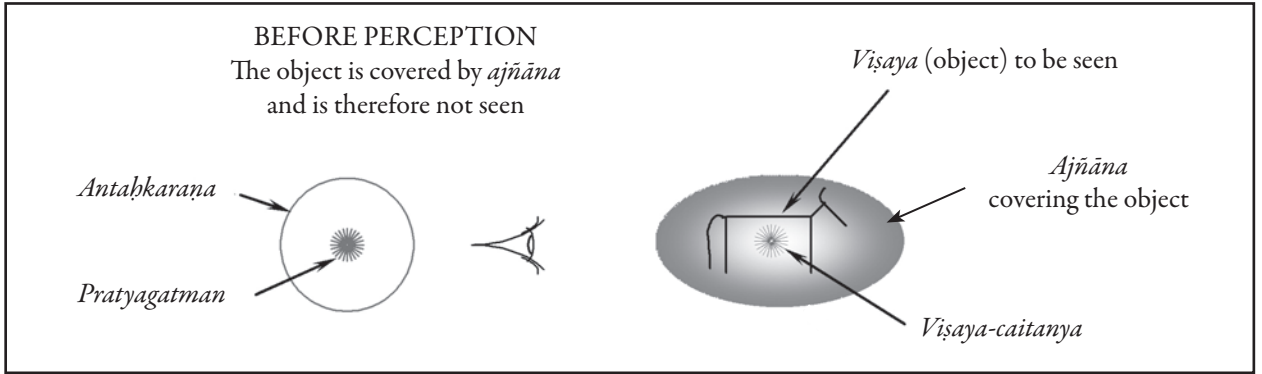
(v) At this stage the unity of consciousness takes place. *Pramāṭṛ-caitanya*, *pramāṇa-caitanya*, and *prameya-caitanya* become one. This unity of consciousness is called *abheda-abhivṛkti*.

(vi) As a result, the knowledge 'I see a cow' arises in the mind.

These mental processes mentioned above are shown diagrammatically below.<sup>19</sup>

object; this means that every time we see an object the Atman reveals itself. But owing to the covering of primordial ignorance, *mūlāvidyā*, ordinary persons are not aware of this constant self-revelation taking place in our day-to-day life.

(iii) In every perception there is also the experience of the non-duality of knowledge, but again, owing to primordial ignorance, ordinary people are not aware of this fact. According to Advaita, all true knowledge is the result of the unity of the



The following important points are to be noted in this context:

(i) The several mental processes described here are all supposed to take place simultaneously, not in stages.

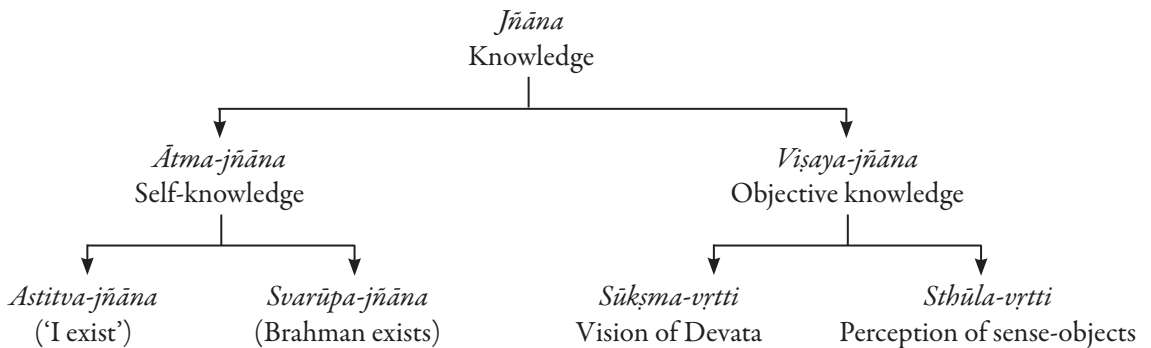
(ii) It is the light of the Atman that reveals an

consciousness underlying the subject, *pramātā*, and the object, *prameya*. Perception is a revelation of this underlying unity of consciousness. Ignorance is a break in the awareness of this unity.

(iv) The mental processes described above take place not only in ordinary sense perception but also

in all other kinds of perception, including mystical visions of deities. The difference between the different types of perception lies in the nature of the *vyrtti* involved. In ordinary perception the *vyrtti* involved is a gross and impure one. In the vision of a deity the *vyrtti* involved is a pure, subtle, sattvic one. In *nirvikalpa samādhi* also a similar process takes place, but here the *vyrtti* involved is known as *akhaṇḍākāra-vyrtti*, which is capable of taking an infinite dimension. Another major difference is that in ordinary perception only a little *avasthā-ajñāna* covering the object is removed. But in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, *mūlāvidyā* itself is removed. However, it is important to note that the *akhaṇḍākāra-vyrtti* only removes the *mūlāvidyā*. As soon as this takes place, Brahman reveals itself; the *cidābhāsa* cannot reveal Brahman—that would be like trying to see the sun with the help of a flash light. That is to say, the self-revelation of Brahman takes place without any *vyrtti*. This realization is what was described above as *svarūpa-jñāna*.

The different types of knowledge discussed so far are shown in the form of a chart below.



To sum up, illusoriness of individuality, a two-level reality, *ajñāna* as the conjoint cause of the world, and the non-duality of knowledge are the four principles constituting the real essence of Advaita Vedanta.

## Notes and References

14. For different theories on the causal role of maya or *ajñāna*, see Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya, 'Post-Śankara Advaita', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, 7 vols (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of

Culture, 2001), 3.255.

15. The *āvaraṇa-śakti* itself, according to Madhusudana Saraswati, consists of three veils. The first veil covers the *sat* aspect of Brahman, the second veil covers the *cit* aspect, and the third veil covers the *ānanda* aspect. The Advaitic realization is a progressive lifting of these veils. See Nalinikanta Brahma, *Philosophy of Hindu Sadhana* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1932), 147. Sri Ramakrishna also, punning on the names of three great Vaishnava saints of Bengal, used to say that God-realization has three stages: Advaita, Chaitanya, and Nityananda. See M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 272, 308.
16. *Kāraṇa-ajñāna* and *kārya-ajñāna* are discussed in Madhusudana Saraswati's *Siddhanta-bindu*. *Īśvara-sṛṣṭi* and *jīva-sṛṣṭi* are discussed in Vidyananda's *Panchadashi*.
17. A simple description of these five polarities in *adhyāsa* is given in the Bengali text *Vedantadarshanam*, trans. and annot. Swami Viswarupananda (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1970), 26.
18. The *Vedanta Paribhasha* mentions *viśayagata-ajñāna* only. The term *avasthā-ajñāna* is mentioned in Yogendranath Bagchi, *Advaitavade Avidya*

(Calcutta: Gupta Press, 1962). See also Swami Tattwavidananda, 'Mūlāvidyā, Avasthāvidyā, and Tulāvidyā', *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*, 49/5 (May 1998), 224–5.

19. The description of the mental process in perception given above is based on Dharmaraja Adhvarindra's *Vedanta Paribhasha*. For a detailed discussion on this subject see, D M Dutta, *The Six Ways of Knowing* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1972), 61–91, and Swami Satprakashananda, *Methods of Knowledge* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974), 98–109.



# Neo-Vedanta and the New World Order

Swami Atmapriyananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

## Jnana and Vijñāna

ONE WHO REALIZES the supreme Reality through the *satya-mithyā* perspective of Vedanta is termed a *jñānin*, while one who realizes it through the *nitya-līlā* perspective of Neo-Vedanta is a *vijñānin*, so named by Sri Ramakrishna himself. The oneness that a *jñānin* perceives is the One as *satya*, against the appearance of the many as *mithyā*, while the oneness that a *vijñānin* perceives is the One as *nitya*, including and subsuming the many as *līlā*. In this all-embracing, all-consuming realization of *vijñāna*, knowledge and love—jnana and bhakti—are integrated, and they issue out through work, karma, in the form of service, *sevā*. This integral vision makes Neo-Vedanta intensely practical and a lever for universal welfare and happiness. It makes Advaita ‘living—poetic—in everyday life’, as Swamiji envisioned it.<sup>20</sup> Sri Ramakrishna once said, ‘Does God exist only when the eyes are closed, and cease to exist when the eyes are opened? The Lila belongs to Him to whom the Nitya belongs, and the Nitya belongs to Him to whom the Lila belongs.’<sup>21</sup> And his remarkable statement about ‘service of man as worship of God’—*śiva jñāne jīva sevā*—is well known. The same Reality that is intuited in meditation with closed eyes as the Transcendent is perceived with open eyes as the Immanent. The Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Gita, have spoken about this integral vision in ever so many passages, but Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji rediscovered these truths and revived them with the power of their direct realization. They rejuvenated and re-presented them in the complex modern age to the sceptical modern man in such a way ‘that a child can grasp it.’<sup>22</sup> Swamiji, in fact, boldly stated that the whole history of human progress could be explained on the

basis of this *vijñāna* vision: ‘We believe that every being is divine, is God. ... We believe that this is the conscious or unconscious basis of all religions, and that this is the explanation of the whole history of human progress either in the material, intellectual, or spiritual plane—the same Spirit is manifesting through different planes’ (4.357).

This message of Neo-Vedanta is but an elaboration of the aphoristic statement of Swamiji quoted earlier: ‘The Many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the same mind at different times and in different attitudes.’ It is this message that forms the basis of Swami Vivekananda’s *sevā yoga*—karma transformed into puja through the vision of *śiva jñāne jīva sevā*. Karma is not opposed to jnana as ordinarily understood in the Advaita Vedanta school of Shankaracharya, but is transformed as ‘expressing jnana and bhakti’. The immortal words of Sister Nivedita embodying her remarkable understanding of Swamiji’s message—Advaita in the Neo-Vedanta framework—are worth quoting in this context:

It must never be forgotten that it was the Swami Vivekananda who, while proclaiming the sovereignty of the Advaita Philosophy, as including that experience in which all is one, without a second, also added to Hinduism the doctrine that Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita are but three phases or stages in a single development, of which the last-named constitutes the goal. This is part and parcel of the still greater and more simple doctrine that the many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes; or as Sri Ramakrishna expressed the same thing, ‘God is both with form and without form. And He is that which includes both form and formlessness.’

It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for here he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma, not as divorced from, but as expressing Jnana and Bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as a commentary upon this central conviction. 'Art, science, and religion,' he said once, 'are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita' (I.xv-xvi).

### **Karma Yoga:**

#### **The New Thrust of Neo-Vedanta**

The integral vision of the Vedic seers who perceived divinity interpenetrating and enveloping everything—*īśā vāsyam-idaṁ sarvam*—was thus restored by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in Neo-Vedanta. Swamiji's great thrust on karma yoga as veritable worship of the immanent Brahman shining everywhere and at all times is the one special feature of Neo-Vedanta. Such work does not cause any bondage—in contrast to the traditional view among Advaita Vedantins who fear that any work is a cause of bondage—because, if looked at from the point of view of jnana, it is actually non-work, since there is no egoistic sense of agency involved and the transcendent Brahman is changeless and immutable; and from the point of view of bhakti it is the veritable worship of the immanent Brahman. Neo-Vedanta is a harmonious blend of these two points of view

from the standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of *vijñāna*, wherein both *nitya* and *līlā* are accepted as the selfsame Reality. This idea of *vijñāna* is closely related to the experience of *bhāvamukha*—a unique and hitherto unknown spiritual and philosophical principle—by Sri Ramakrishna. *Bhāvamukha* itself would need a separate and elaborate article which would be attempted later.

Two Sanskrit words commonly used in Vedanta, *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*, traditionally meant involvement in and abstention from work respectively. But Swamiji gave a wonderfully new interpretation based on the etymological meaning of these words—which are derived from the Sanskrit root *vṛt* meaning 'to revolve or to circle'—making a clear departure from the emphasis laid by Shankaracharya in traditional Vedanta. Rather than understanding the terms as movements towards and away from work—or, work being equated with samsara, towards and away from samsara—Swami Vivekananda gave the novel explanation that they meant a cycling towards and away from the 'puny ego', the egoity that usurps to itself the sense of agency. According to Swamiji, *pravṛt-ti* means 'revolving towards' the little self, and *ni-vṛt-ti* means 'revolving away from' the little self. Thus, anything that makes one move towards the little self, aggrandizes the little self, the 'me and mine', causes bondage, is unspiritual, irreligious, unethical, immoral, and debasing. This is the real 'original sin'—selfishness, self-aggrandizement. And anything that takes one away from the bondage of the little self is spiritual, religious, ethical, moral, and ennobling. In this way he defined karma yoga as the path of *nivṛtti* in that it is a 'moving away from' or 'cycling away from' the puny little ego, the 'me and mine'.<sup>23</sup>

Such a movement away from the little self can be termed, in positive language, as a movement towards Brahman, 'the vast'. One thus gets the feel of *brahma-saṁsparśa*, 'the touch of Brahman', in the words of the Gita, and gets liberated from bondage. Shankaracharya too, in his commentary on the Gita, says that work done without the sense of agency, without any touch of egocentricity, cannot be called work at all: *na tat karma yena buddheḥ*

*samuccayah syāt*; it has just the semblance of work; in reality it cannot be classified as karma in the technical sense.<sup>24</sup>

As a corollary of all this, we find two characteristics of Neo-Vedanta that stand out as unique: (i) its unequivocal thrust on karma yoga as absolute self-abandonment or self-abnegation for those who have no inclination for either jnana or bhakti; as *upāsana*, worship of the immanent Brahman for those who are jnana-oriented; or as loving worship of the God present in all beings for those who are bhakti-inclined; and (ii) its use of this thrust to restore the religion of ‘love as service’, thus integrating bhakti and jnana—the worship of the Immanent and the realization of the Transcendent—with karma, bringing about a wonderful fusion aimed at an integrated total human development: material development, intellectual development, and spiritual development. Swamiji wanted to achieve this threefold development through the simple application of the power of the Spirit at the three levels of human endeavour: ‘This infinite power of the spirit, brought to bear upon matter evolves material development, made to act upon thought evolves intellectuality, and made to act upon itself makes of man a God.’<sup>25</sup>

### **Satya Yuga: A New World Order**

The three principles of Neo-Vedanta mentioned earlier, and discussed briefly in their various ramifications, have the following further revolutionary implications:

Principle One, the divinity of humans, engenders a new social philosophy, *nava-samāja-tantra*, when applied to the collective, to society as a whole, in the East and the West. Swamiji pointed this out when he said that the doctrine of human divinity was ‘the explanation of the whole history of human progress either in the material, intellectual, or spiritual plane. ... It is the duty of every *soul* to treat, think of, and behave to other *souls* as such, i.e. as *Gods*’ (4.357).

Out of the Principle Two, the unity of all existence or solidarity of the universe, would come a new social science, *nava-samāja-vijñāna*, of Neo-Vedanta. Its first offshoots have already been seen


in the physical sciences through the relentless attempts at finding a unified field theory and, through the superstring theory, a theory of everything; in the mental sciences through Western psychology and Carl Jung’s idea of the ‘collective unconscious’, and through the joint research of Jung and nuclear physicist Pauli into the Cosmic Mind, Hiranyagarbha; and in the spiritual sciences through the concept of the one supreme Brahman as the all-subsuming transcendent Consciousness, manifesting as the all-pervading immanent *sat-cit-ānanda*, as discovered by the Upanishadic rishis.

Out of Principle Three, the essential spirituality of life, would emerge a new social consciousness or awareness, *nava-samāja-cetanā*, in which the distinctions between sacred and secular, between religion and science, between monk and householder, between jnana and karma would all be erased. ‘Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends. This will be the religion of the future, and if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples,’ as Swamiji declared in his lectures on jnana yoga (2.140). In this *nava-samāja-cetanā* of Neo-Vedanta the integral and holistic Vedic vision of one life—the divine life—will have re-emerged in full bloom; the Vedic ideal of rishi-hood would be rediscovered and rejuvenated. Such a rishi in the modern age would be a person of divine wisdom, a complete human being, a world citizen: not a householder or a sannyasin or a yogi or a scientist or an engineer or a poet or an artist or a social worker or whatever else separately—but *all* these and much more. He would represent humanity—which would then only be another name for divinity—in all its fullness. Swamiji believed that it was to revive this rishi ideal that Sri Ramakrishna was born. His blessing to modern humans is therefore couched in the following exhortation: ‘Be a Rishi!’

Thus, the new world order, *nava-yuga-dharma* in Swamiji’s words, that would emerge out of the three above-mentioned principles of Neo-Vedanta, would uphold the rishi ideal before men and women of all countries and invite them to attain

or at least approximate this grand ideal. It is this new world order that Swamiji called the Satya Yuga. And in a prophetic utterance he said that Sri Ramakrishna's advent marks the beginning of this era: 'From the date that the Ramakrishna Incarnation was born, has sprung the Satya-Yuga (Golden Age). ... In this Incarnation ... the whole world will be unified by means of Bhakti (devotion) and Prema (Divine Love)' (6.327–8).

Sri Ramakrishna had prophesied that when Swamiji realized who and what he was, wherefrom and why he had come to the earth, he would refuse to remain in the body any longer and would pass away of his own will—after having shaken the world to its foundations through the strength of his intellectual and spiritual powers. On the last day of his life, 4 July 1902, the thin veil that Sri Ramakrishna had covered Swamiji with for the sake of his work was fully pierced, 'the flood-gates of his soul were thrown open and the living waters of the highest Consciousness rushed forth';<sup>26</sup> he was heard saying to himself: 'If there were another Vivekananda, he would have understood what Vivekananda has done! And yet, how many Vivekanandas shall be born in time!!' (ibid). He passed away in the final beatitude of mahasamadhi, but said that he would not cease to work, promising that he would 'inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God'.


Neo-Vedanta, therefore, is not a mere philosophy or a new wave of thought, but a vibrant living movement. May it inspire people everywhere and for ages to come to bring about an awakening in the global consciousness of humankind, aimed at establishing peace and prosperity, all-round welfare, and universal happiness. It is now, when humankind is most strife-torn, conflict-ridden, anxiety-prone, and panic-stricken that minds the world over would be benefited by listening to this sublime message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. 

## References

20. *Complete Works*, 5.104.

21. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 778.  
 22. *Complete Works*, 5.105.  
 23. See *Complete Works*, 1.85–6.  
 24. Shankaracharya's commentary on Gita, 2.11.  
 25. *Complete Works*, 4.351.  
 26. *The Life*, 2.652.

(Continued from page 194)

(i) A vigorous state with a strong and disciplined body of citizens. This discipline should not be a negative regimentation but a positive orderliness propelled by a life of the spirit: of renunciation and service. (ii) A dynamic leadership to guide forward the nation, with head held high and feet firmly planted in the contemporary socioeconomic reality. In bequeathing this very contemporary and relevant message, and in the legacy of such vision and values, lie the lasting significance of Subhas Chandra Bose's political ideas. 

## Notes and References

1. Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle (1935–1942)* (Calcutta: Chakravarti, Chatterjee & Co., 1952), 429.
2. Bose's speech as reported in the *Hindustan Times*, 8 March 1946.
3. *The Indian Struggle*, 72.
4. Bose's speech as reported in the *Hindustan Times*, 8 March 1946. See also V P Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought* (Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 1964), 500, footnote 1; and Hugh Toye, *Subhas Chandra Bose (The Springing Tiger): A Study of a Revolution* (Bombay: Jaico, 1991), 62.
5. Bose's article on 'Japan's Role in the Far East' as published in *Modern Review*, 1937, is noteworthy.
6. Bose's presidential address at the All India Anti-Compromise Conference held at Ramgarh on 19 March 1940. See *Modern Indian Political Thought*, 493.
7. For Bose's presidential address at the Haripura session of the Congress, see *The Indian Annual Register*, 1.340–6.
8. See *The Indian Struggle*, 428–9.
9. See *Selected Speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1962), 32.



# Mahendranath Gupta: The Morton Institution and Naimisharanya

Swami Chetanananda

**M**ANY PEOPLE HAVE A PROBLEM reconciling their day-to-day activities with their spiritual disciplines. Even monks face this dilemma; in their case it is between action and contemplation. Some monastics think that the contemplative life is better than the active life. In the Bhagavadgita, however, Krishna reconciled all four yogas: karma, action; jnana, knowledge; bhakti, devotion; and raja, meditation. He pointed out that liberation is possible through each one of them, as seen in the Gita quotes below.

Karma Yoga: 'Therefore always do without attachment the work you have to do; for a man who does his work without attachment attains the Supreme.'<sup>1</sup>

Jnana Yoga: 'And those who have completely controlled their senses and are even-minded under all conditions and thus worship the Imperishable, the Ineffable, the Unmanifest, the Omnipresent, the Incomprehensible, the Immutable, the Unchanging, the Eternal—they, devoted to the welfare of all beings, attain Me alone, and none else' (12.3–4).

Bhakti Yoga: 'But by devotion to Me alone may I be known in this [Cosmic] form, O Arjuna, realized truly, and entered into, O dreaded prince' (11.54).

Raja Yoga: 'Shutting out all external objects; fixing the gaze of his eyes between his brows; equalizing the outward and inward breaths moving in his nostrils; controlling his senses, mind, and understanding; being ever bent on liberation; ridding himself of desire, fear, and anger—such a man of contemplation is indeed always free' (5.27–8).

Is it possible for a householder with a full-time job and a family to realize God? Ramakrishna was asked this question repeatedly, and he always an-

swered it the same way: 'Everybody will surely be liberated. But one should follow the instructions of the guru. ... Sages like Janaka performed worldly duties. They performed them, bearing God in their minds, as a dancing-girl dances, keeping jars or trays on her head. Haven't you seen how the women in northwest India walk, talking and laughing while carrying water-pitchers on their heads?'<sup>2</sup>

Ramakrishna often expanded on this, as is seen in the following excerpt from the *Gospel*:

To live in the world in a detached spirit is very difficult. By merely saying so you cannot be a King Janaka. How much austerity Janaka practised! ... You don't have to practise these extreme disciplines. But you need sādhanā; you should live in solitude. You may lead the life of a householder after having attained divine knowledge and love in solitude. ...

Janaka was a great hero. He fenced with two swords, the one of knowledge and the other of work.

You may ask, 'Is there any difference between the realizations of two jñānis, one a householder and the other a monk?' The reply is that the two belong to one class. Both of them are jñānis; they have the same experience. But a householder jñāni has reason to fear. He cannot altogether get rid of his fear as long as he is to live in the midst of 'woman and gold'. If you constantly live in a room full of soot, you are sure to soil your body, be it ever so little, no matter how clever you may be. ...

Although a jñāni living in the world may have a little blemish, yet this does not injure him. The moon undoubtedly has dark spots, but these do not obstruct its light.

After realizing God, some souls perform work in order to teach men. Janaka, Nārada, and others like them, belong to this group (856–7).



*The Morton Institution, now called 'Hindu Academy'*

M also belonged to this group. Ramakrishna trained him to be a householder jnani. As King Janaka ruled his kingdom yet remained absorbed in Brahman and talked about him, so also M did his work, teaching and supervising a school, while the remaining time he was absorbed in God-consciousness, writing the Master's gospel, and talking about him to seekers of God.

### **The Morton Institution**

M's first job was in 1879 as a headmaster in Narail High School, Jessore, now in Bangladesh, where he worked for nearly a year. In 1880, M became the headmaster and superintendent of the Metropolitan High School, Shyampukur branch, which was owned by the great educator and social reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. M stayed at the Metropolitan until 1886. From then, until 1905, he worked as a professor and headmaster in different colleges and schools in Calcutta, and finally in 1905 he bought the Morton Institution at Jhamapukur in Calcutta from the son of Nakri Ghosh. The school soon became so popular that one house could not accommodate all its students; so M rented a four-storey building at 50 Amherst Street. This building

looked like a chariot and was painted red. At that time the streets in Calcutta were not overcrowded, and they were lined with flowering trees such as *bakul*, *kadamba*, and *krishna-chura*. M became the rector, and the teachers and students called him 'Rector Mahashaya'. M's eldest son, Prabhas, was the headmaster, and Fakir Babu was the superintendent. Classes for grades one through five were held at a house on Panchanan Ghosh Lane, close to the main building; and classes for grades six to ten were held at the Amherst Street building. Later on all classes were held in the latter building. The school was only for boys.

M divided his time between the Morton Institution, where he stayed in a room on the fourth floor of the Amherst Street building, and Thakur Bari, his family home. After he bought the Morton Institution in 1905, he slowly withdrew himself from regular teaching. He made decisions about the school's management and also watched the students when they entered the school, during lunch, and when they left. Sometimes, however, he taught classes on religion, morality, and patriotism, and also substituted for absent teachers.

Mahimaranjan Bhattacharya, a student of the Morton Institution in 1921, recalled:

Our Geography teacher was absent on that day, so the Rector Mahashaya took the class in his place. The topic of the lesson was Arabia. He taught us in a manner I can never forget. The main fruit of Arabia is date. The story how a merchant threw away the stone after eating the fruit, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, Mecca and Medina, and the story of the Prophet—how beautifully he narrated all these! ...

Besides these casual classes, the Rector would sometimes come for lessons on morals and ethics. He would also tell us the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, stories of great men, and explain in simple language verses from the Gita: *Manushyatvam mumukshutvam mahapurusha samskrayah*—humanity, longing for liberation, and the company of the holy—these are the three essentials of spiritual life. I knew this by heart. Nobody had ever seen the Rector reprimanding anybody. He would never lose his temper, let alone inflict bodily punishment.

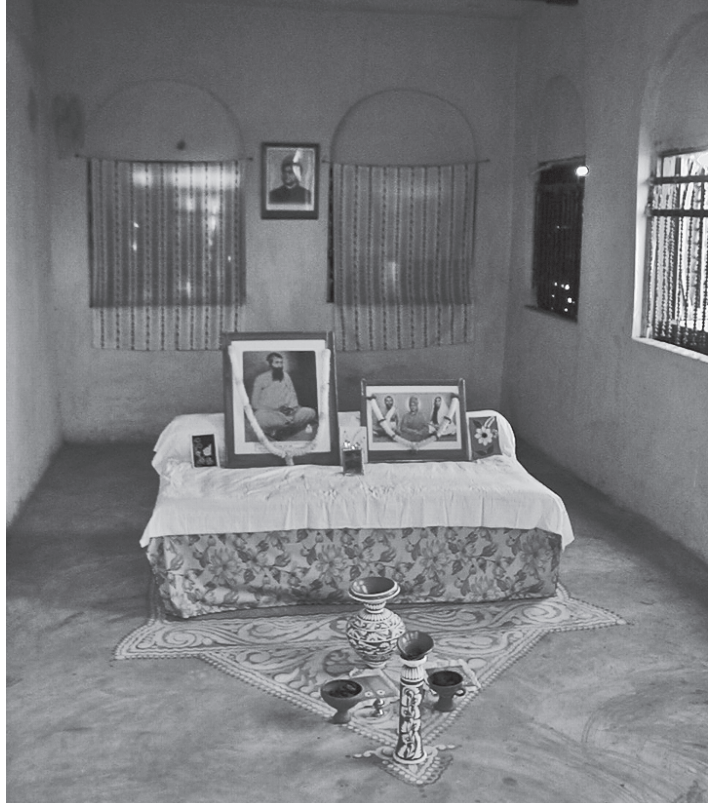
But his personality was such that on hearing his deep voice even from a distance: 'Please, place your hands on your knees and sit up erect', we would immediately place our hands on our knees and sit up straight. The whole class would become so quiet that one could hear one's own breathing. We never saw him raising his voice at anybody. ...

In Sri M's school, the study of Sri Ramakrishna's life and the *Kathamrita* was compulsory. ...

Along with his solemn and loving personality, his dress was also notable. A kurta with a folded cloth round his back, its two ends hanging over the shoulders opening out on his chest, long hair, ample beard reaching up to his chest, and big eyes—peaceful and patient as if turned inwards. On his feet he wore polished shoes or sometimes slippers; his gait was firm and patient. Sometimes he would hold his hands clasped on his back. At the tiffin hour in school or at the close of the day or at the time of coming to school he would stand and keep on looking at the boys. Either he would be in the schoolroom going over the papers of the day or he would walk up and down with his hands behind his back. I felt awed on approaching him, but later on when I came in closer contact with him I realized what a gentle loving soul lay hidden behind the outer veil, a touch of which has blessed me forever.

The place Sri M occupied in the midst of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna was beyond my ken at that age—I have earlier said so. But I was old enough to see that Sri M was far above the common man. Many a high-class sadhu and saint used to visit Sri M from Belur Math and elsewhere and so did many seekers who came to him for instruction—and to dispel their sorrows. I can still recall the faces of some of those persons. Much later I came to know of their identity. But then I had the simplicity of a child with his unshakable faith and unique curiosity. I have now lost that longing and regret why I did not go nearer the Rector Mahashaya—had I at least spent some more time in closer contact with him, my life would have become meaningful. ...

One day I entered the room of the Rector Mahashaya in the recess period, full of trepidation. He was then seated on a blanket with both of his hands joined on his lap; perhaps he was meditating. On entering I immediately saw that



*M's private room on the top floor of the Morton Institution*

it was not a residential room, nor even the usual puja room. It was a temple. There were pictures all around—that of the Paramahansa Deva, the Holy Mother, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda), Mother Bhavatarini, and so many pictures of other gods and goddesses, even a picture of Jesus Christ. On each of the pictures there were devotional marks of sandalwood paste and flowers, and the perfume of the burning incense. I felt something—this 'something' cannot be expressed in words. ... He had seen me, so he asked me to take my seat. He offered me some fruit etc. as *prasad*, which I accepted with a mind full of devotion. ...

The Rector gave me some advice before I left—according to the present reckoning it was perhaps banal but to us of the older generation so invaluable: adoration of parents, complete dependence on God, compassion for created beings—these were his main instructions. ...

Seen superficially, Sri M looked like a worldly person. He would keep a perfect account of profit and loss of his money. He also ran his school so efficiently. In the matter of spending also he was so thrifty. Not only did he believe in thrift for himself, he would also teach his pupils not to spend needlessly. How could such a man be a realized soul and the winner of the grace of the Supreme



Person? To understand this, one had to know Sri M more intimately. ...

Many outsiders could not see how indifferent Sri M was to physical comforts. And they did not know, possibly do not know even now, how unbounded was his charity. And yet his left hand did not know what his right hand gave away. ... When Swamiji's family was passing through terrible times because of want of money and was actually starving, it pulled through for three months with Sri M's financial help. At the end of every month he was seen filling a number of money-order forms. It can only be surmised that they were meant for the needy fellow-disciples of his Gurudeva who had fallen into straitened circumstances. There were those among them who could not afford medically prescribed diet, others who needed medical care, yet some other saintly persons who depended on charity for living. Sri M knew them all—I believe he must have been noting down in his diary or some other notebook what and how much these persons needed. No doubt, he had a phenomenal memory.<sup>3</sup>

M's notebook later revealed that he used the income he earned from the *Kathamrita* to support several monks of the Ramakrishna Order who were either sick or practising austerities.

The Morton Institution was a reputable school, and the students had good results in their final examinations and university entrance examinations. Sometime in the late 1920s, when Sir Jadunath Sarkar was the vice chancellor of Calcutta University (1926–7), this university withdrew its affiliation with the Morton Institution. We do not know the exact reason. It may be that M had introduced religious education into the curriculum and instilled patriotism among the students during that British period. It is also said that there was a difference of opinion between M and the university authorities regarding how the school committee was formed. M then had to cancel the ninth and tenth grades. The institution remained a private school, but limited to grades one through eight. This reduced his income significantly, but the alternative was to lose his freedom, which he did not want to do.<sup>4</sup> M's friends and well-wishers ad-

vised him to take legal action; he could have easily won the lawsuit, but he refused. M renamed the school Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Institution and continued leading it until he passed away in 1932.<sup>5</sup> When Prabhas died in 1934, the school changed ownership.<sup>6</sup> It is now called the Hindu Academy.

### **M as an Educator**

M was an excellent teacher, held in high esteem by the great educators of the day as well as by national leaders. Here are three recommendations from well-known academics of the time:

I have known Babu Mahendra Nath Gupta, since his appointment as Headmaster and Superintendent of the Shyampukur Branch of the Metropolitan Institution in January 1880. He has given me satisfaction by diligent and attentive discharge of the duties entrusted to him. He is proficient in the art of teaching and is a remarkably intelligent and well informed gentleman of amiable disposition and an exceptional character.

Ishwar Chandra Sarma [Vidyasagar]  
Calcutta, 26 June 1882

Certified that Babu Mahendra Nath Gupta was Professor of English and Political Economy and Moral Philosophy in the Ripon College and satisfactorily discharged his duties. He has a high sense of his responsibilities. Professor M. N. Gupta was employed in the Ripon College for about six years.

Surendra Nath Banerjee  
The Ripon College, 60 Mirzapur Street  
Calcutta, 6 April 1898

Babu Mahendra Nath Gupta, B.A., was a professor of English, History and Political Economy in the Metropolitan Institution for one academic Session. He had to teach the B.A. classes (Pass and Honours) and also F.A. classes. He did his work thoroughly well, commanded the respect and affection of his pupils, and inspired the confidence of the College authorities.

N. N. Ghosh  
Principal, Metropolitan Institution  
Calcutta, 31 May 1900<sup>7</sup>



M was not just an ordinary teacher who taught the university curriculum as outlined by the British government. He had his own thoughts regarding education and was greatly inspired by Ramakrishna's mode of teaching, which he incorporated into his own teaching. Because the Morton Institution was a private school, M had the freedom to incorporate his method of teaching in addition to the curriculum of the university.

Mahimaranjan recalled: 'Why did Sri M's teachings go straight to the heart? So many persons teach, but their teachings have little effect. The reason is that Sri M would teach only what he himself believed in and had practised in his life. Without being determinedly true to one's vows nobody can do it.'<sup>8</sup>

M emphasized national education, man-making education, and the goal of education. He said:

One should know first the contents of human beings, and then philosophy or the plan of education. Each human being has three bodies: gross or physical, subtle or intellectual, and causal or spiritual. It is extremely important to feed all three bodies so that they become strong. Our schools and colleges are feeding only the subtle body. The educational system must be connected with the spiritual body, which will form character and will bring peace and joy. If education is not connected with the Highest Ideal, the moral character will not be strong. India's culture is grand and great because of her educational system. In olden days students would live with their gurus and received broad training that developed all three levels of their bodies. Before planning for education, we should first set the ideals of a human being, the ideals of national life. Otherwise it would be like water poured from a pitcher, which is falling on the floor because the glass is far away. It turns into fruitless toil.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the goals of education, M emphasized building character first, and second, passing the university entrance examination. A student should be idealistic and at the same time practical. Without a university education a student cannot procure a good job with a decent salary. Until one

attains the highest spiritual realization, one should not neglect materialistic prosperity following scientific advancements.

In addition to building character and enabling students to enter the university, M also sought to provide a 'man-making education' for the boys whom he taught. The following were his guidelines:

1. It is essential to present the goal of human life to students from an early age. We need genuine human beings to build the nation. Under the influence of the British, students learn that the goal of education is to achieve fame, prestige, and money.

2. The students should be brave and physically strong. A butter-doll is good for nothing. They should be taught manliness from their childhood onwards.

3. Students should learn the dignity of labour; there is no shame in doing one's own work. The British educational system did not emphasize the dignity of labour; rather it trained a few Indians to imitate the British, who used the natives to do menial jobs. Even in his old age M demonstrated to his students how to remain active. He did his own chores, contributed to the household work, and even repaired the roof of the school building himself.

4. M worked to develop perseverance and tenacity in his students. He said: 'Try, try again. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Never give up until you reach the goal.'

5. M emphasized moral and spiritual education and introduced his students to the lives of the great teachers of the world and to the *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. He believed that Ramakrishna's catholic views about religion could eradicate religious fanaticism.

6. In M's time there were no teacher-training colleges, so he recommended that teachers get good training. He also advocated training for parents or guardians because students lived at home, not with a guru as in ancient times.

7. 'Teaching is an art,' said M. The teacher should be a person of good character and must be tactful

enough to handle students without scolding and caning them, as was common in his time. M also said: 'The Master said, "It is better to hear than to read, and better to see than to hear."' So a teacher should read and then teach students verbally instead of forcing them to read books themselves. Teachers should use pictures, diagrams, and maps so that students can visualize what they are learning. And from time to time teachers should take students to various places so that they can see what is actually being discussed.

M said: 'Some professors who lecture in English in colleges have no clear idea of what they are teaching, because they do not know that language well enough. So how will the students learn? They memorize the lessons without understanding them, then pass the examinations and receive a BA or MA degree. When the British authorities encouraged Vidyasagar to spread their method of education, he replied with a smile, "Yes, the students will pass the examinations but learn very little"' (11.12).

According to M, the medium of education should be the students' native language. Students must learn English and Sanskrit, of course, but before teaching in these languages the teacher should first explain the theme in the mother tongue. During the classes the teacher should check from time to time to ensure that students are absorbing the subject.<sup>10</sup>

Swami Nityatmananda, a teacher in the Morton Institution, wrote: 'I worked with M in the school and realized that he was a teacher of a high calibre. Although he was such a great scholar, while teaching he would come down to the level of the students. He would study the minds of the students and find out how much they could absorb and how they could learn properly. He would use maps, pictures, diagrams, and other methods so that the students could learn well. He introduced Bengali as the medium of instruction in the Morton Institution. He was not only a teacher of students, he also taught the teachers the methods of proper teaching.'<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the method of teaching, M said: 'An ideal method of learning is when a student learns using all five organs of knowledge' (4.248-9). When teachers give lectures, students use only one organ of knowledge—the ears. They use their eyes and ears if diagrams and maps are also provided. Likewise they learn more by using other organs of knowledge—nose, tongue, and skin.

On the first and second floors of the Morton Institution, M taught *apara vidya*, regular education, to his ordinary students, and on the fourth floor—in Naimisharanya—he taught *para vidya*, supreme knowledge, to seekers of God.

One needs an education to improve one's standard of living, so M always encouraged his students to apply themselves: 'Study well. It helps us get acquainted with various thoughts of the world, and the interactions of thoughts develop our mental culture. Finally, the mind resorts to sublime thoughts. Furthermore, when one is always engaged in learning higher thoughts, that develops brahmacharya and eventually enhances love and attraction for God.'<sup>12</sup>

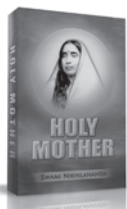
(To be concluded)

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11. *Srima Darshan*, 1.xii.
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# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



## **Holy Mother**

Swami Nikhilananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai  
600 004. E-mail: [srkmath@vsnl.com](mailto:srkmath@vsnl.com).  
xii + 356 pp. Rs 100.

This elegantly brought out book is a vivid and intimate portrait of Sri Sarada Devi, revered as Holy Mother. The Ramakrishna Math has earlier published two biographies of Sri Sarada Devi written by eminent monks of the Order. It is a challenging task to work on the hagiography of one who zealously concealed her divinity. Swami Nikhilananda's work—the swami was initiated into monastic life by Sri Sarada Devi—has a freshness of approach and the contents are embellished by his remarkable writing skills.

Sri Sarada Devi's life has a unique place in spiritual history. She combined in herself the roles of a nun, mother, and wife. Leading a very simple life, enduring extreme hardship—financially and otherwise—in a feudal society, yet radiating love and compassion for humans as well as other creatures, is not easy. With no formal education she was *sanghajanani*, mother of the Order, giving shape and motivating a movement that has made history in service to humanity. The author brings to focus Sri Sarada Devi's love, which extended beyond caste, creed, religion, and nationality. Her life and talks are a lesson in true love, well beyond the concept of Platonic love.

Sri Sarada Devi suffered the ignominy of being a widow in a nineteenth-century rural India, steeped in senseless orthodoxy and superstition. In due course she demonstrated the true spirit of purity in life and 'condemned the morbid passion for purity especially regarding pollution by touch'. Her support for education of women and for learning English is refreshingly original and progressive.

Swami Nikhilananda also presents another unique feature of Sri Sarada Devi's life: Though she remained devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, she never compromised on her role as mother; there her will reigned supreme. She explained her attitude thus: In respect of spiritual matters, absolute obedience to

the Master; in other matters, 'I used my own commonsense'. Sri Ramakrishna treated her with due regard and respected her views. Referring to her as 'Saraswati' he warned devotees that if anyone caused annoyance to her even he would not be able to help. Such was her stature.

A chapter dedicated to 'Radhu' explains how a 'troublesome, incongruous and rebellious' character had a major role in 'chaining' Holy Mother to a worldly life to complete her mission. One may also pick up subtle lessons on the need for a support system in households having a member emotionally unbalanced.

The book will evoke eternal interest. It has a message for all sections of our society, a society that believes in conservatism and has a skewed view of chastity and the role of women.

P S Sundaram  
Chennai



## **India and China: A Thousand Years of Cultural Relations**

Prabodh Chandra Bagchi;  
Rev. and ed. Haraprasad Ray

Munshiram Manoharlal, PO Box 5715,  
54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055.  
E-mail: [mrml@mantraonline.com](mailto:mrml@mantraonline.com). 2008.  
xxii + 232 pp. Rs 650.

Now that the entire world is focused on the rise of India and China and the shift of global power from the West to the East, it is pertinent to look at these two Asian giants with a sense of history. Given the paucity of literature and even public discussion on the historical origins of the India-China relations, it is a welcome step that the publishers of the original print have come out with this revised edition.

The book deals with the emergence of Buddhism in India and the rise of Central Asian kingdoms at a time marked by the Westward expansion of the Chinese empire into Central Asia. The book discusses in much detail the routes of communication

between India and China and shows how the early trade and cultural contacts were essentially 'Buddhist routes' through which comprehensive cultural interactions began and continued for over a thousand years. The pioneers of these cultural interactions were two Buddhist monks from India—Dharmaratna and Kashyapa Matanga—who were invited by the Chinese Emperor in 65 CE to reside in China and translate some Buddhist texts. Emperor Ashoka's initiative in introducing Buddhism into Sri Lanka had already set in motion the robust and vibrant expansion of this new religion into much of the Asian continent: Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, Japan, and Korea. There are detailed chapters on 'Ancient Chinese Pilgrims to India' and the evolution of Buddhism and its literature in China. In fact, we obtain crucial information about the history of Buddhism from these Chinese sources as many of these texts were lost in India.

The author's research demonstrates that the rise and subsequent fortunes of Buddhism in China were inextricably tied to the patronage extended by Chinese emperors. By the tenth century, the local Confucian and Taoist literati opposed Buddhism on the grounds of it being a foreign religion and this led to a gradual decline in the royal patronage and general acceptability of Buddhism. Also, while the Buddhist monks and scholars were committed to spreading the message of Buddha with a sense of selfless devotion, the motives of the Chinese emperors in patronizing the religion were largely political—it was seen as an instrument for cultivating better relations with the Central Asian kingdoms and India.

The book offers a panoramic view of a thousand-year period when India contributed to the intellectual and religious history of the entire Eastern Asia through Buddhism and the agents of this great movement were not armies or diplomats but monks and scholars. The uniqueness of this book stems from the author's utilizing a plethora of important material collected from original Chinese sources along with the findings of French and German sinologists. The breadth of the subject matter and the in-depth research undertaken by the author, back in the 1940s, is truly commendable. The book should be of invaluable help to all students of Buddhism in general and those interested in the history of India-China relations in particular.

*Dr Vinayak Rao*

Consultant, Higher Education, Leadership,  
and International Affairs  
New Delhi



### **Sketches of Saints Known and Unknown**

J P Vaswani

Sterling Paperbacks, A-59 Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110 020.  
E-mail: [sterlingpublishers@airtelmail.in](mailto:sterlingpublishers@airtelmail.in).  
2008. 250 pp. Rs 200.

In this book Dada Vaswani has presented the lives and teachings of a few great souls. The back cover notes: 'Dada's profound admiration, love and reverence for these great souls transcends all narrow boundaries ... Thus he writes with equal respect for Sadhvi Vasuki and Mother Teresa; Adi Shankara comes alive in these pages as does Father Damien; Albert Schweitzer is featured here, as is Hasan Darvesh.' The book also contains vivid character sketches of the other torchbearers of divinity: Kabir, Ishadassi, Avvaiyar, Sadhu Hiranand, Sister Nivedita, Swami Rama Lingam, Sadhu Vaswani, Gurudev Ranade, Jose Rizal, Shabari, Swami Leela Shah, Sadna *Kasai*, and Zarathrustra.

Each chapter is preceded by a brief introduction of the saint written in a single page box with his or her message and contribution. At the end of each chapter the sayings and a lists of books *of* and *on* the particular saint are given. This provides a variety of sources for readers wishing to delve further into the lives and times of the saints. The character sketches are vibrant, comprehensive and take us directly to the dominant note of their lives.

All the personalities profiled in this book have one experience in common: they achieved enlightenment and strove to remove human suffering. This book makes an elevating, inspiring, and purifying reading. The language bears the stamp of Dada: very clear and lucid.

*Dr Chetana Mandavia*

Professor of Plant Physiology  
Junagadh Agricultural University  
Junagadh

### **BOOK RECEIVED**



### **A Short Life of Rani Rashmoni**

H N Sarkar

Sri Ramakrishna Kendra, Jagacha, Howrah. 2009. 154 pp. Rs 50.

A short study of the life of a remarkable nineteenth-century woman who rose above caste limitations by dint of courage, sagacity, and hard work.



# REPORTS

## News from Branch Centres

In a function held at the **Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata**, on 18 November 2009, Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, then Governor of West Bengal, presented the Vivekananda Medal, comprising a gold medal, a cash award of Rs 50,000 and a citation, to Prof. Brij Nath Kaul of Srinagar, Kashmir. Swami Prabhananda, general secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, attended the programme as the chief guest.

On 29 November **Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Viveknagar**, organized an All Tripura Devotees' Conference at the Ashrama, which was attended by 547 devotees.

The Regional Braille Press of Blind Boys' Academy, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, won the national and state awards for the empowerment of persons with disabilities for 2009, in recognition of its publication of Braille literature in six languages for the last 43 years. Smt Pratibha Patil, President of India, and Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Governor of West Bengal, handed over the awards at New Delhi and Kolkata respectively on 3 December, the international day of persons with disabilities.

## Relief

**Flood Relief** • Centres in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka continued relief operations among flood victims. Details of the relief materials distributed by



*Prof. Brij Nath Kaul receiving the Vivekananda Medal*

them are as follows. **Kadapa**: 7,500 saris and an equal number of dhotis and bed-sheets to 7,500 families of 15 villages in Kurnool district from 9 to 17 December. **Belgaum**: 205 saris to 70 families of one village of Gokak taluk in Belgaum district on 6 December.

**Cyclone Aila Relief** • Centres in West Bengal continued relief operations among the victims of Aila Cyclone. Details of the relief materials distributed are as follows. **Manasadwip**: 765 saris and 150 dhotis to 915 families of 5 villages in Sagar block, South 24-Parganas district, in September and October. **Swamiji's Ancestral House**: 2,000 blankets to cyclone victims at 5 villages of Hingalganj block in North 24-Parganas district from 24 November to 5 December.

**Winter Relief** • 8,414 blankets were distributed to people affected by the severity of winter through the following centres: **Baranagar Mission**: 2,500; **Bhubaneswar**: 600; **Chandigarh**: 400; **Chandipur**: 500; **Coimbatore Mission**: 325; **Cooch Behar**: 300; **Garbeta**: 136; **Jalpaiguri**: 200; **Jamshedpur**: 72; **Karimganj**: 1,000; **Manasadwip**: 200; **Narainpur**: 81; **Puri Mission**: 1,000; **Saradapitha**: 1,100. Besides, the following centres distributed woollen chadars to the needy: **Baranagar Math**: 180; **Sargachhi**: 160.

**Distress Relief** • The following centres distributed various items to the needy in their respective areas: **Baranagar Mission**: 259 saris; **Chandigarh**: 350 assorted garments; **Porbandar**: 102 pieces of equipment, including artificial legs, calipers, walkers, arm-rests, and belts to disabled persons.

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## Synopsis of the Ramakrishna Mission Governing Body's Report for 2008-09

The 100th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 20 December 2009 at 3.30 p.m. The Mission completed 100 years since its registration on 4 May 1909 with the Registrar of Societies.

During the year under review the Mission started a new centre at Hatamuniguda in Rayagada, Orissa.

In the educational field, the following new projects deserve special mention: starting of a

postgraduate course in Bengali at Vidyamandira college of Saradapitha centre; a postgraduate course in Chemistry at Vivekananda Centenary College of Rahara centre; three courses, viz. Communicative German, Communicative Chinese, and Business Chinese at the School of Languages of the Institute of Culture, Gol Park; two programmes, viz. Industry Sponsored Skill Training programme for school dropouts and Skill Training course on construction at Industrial Training Institute in Coimbatore centre; postgraduate training courses in Plastic Surgery and Pathology in the Vivekananda Polyclinic of Lucknow centre; a post basic B.Sc. nursing college in Seva Pratisthan centre (Kolkata).

In the medical field, the following new projects deserve special mention: starting of an MRI unit at Seva Pratisthan centre; a 24-bed orthopaedic ward at the Vivekananda Polyclinic of Lucknow centre; a panchakarma therapy unit at Narendrapur centre; a mobile medical unit at Purulia centre and a physiotherapy department in the dispensary of Vrindavan centre.

In the rural development field, the following new projects deserve special mention: distribution of 200 bee-keeping boxes along with kits and tools to 200 villagers by Cherrapunjee centre; construction of 2 check dams at the foot of Ayodhya hills by Purulia centre; construction of a stop-dam and 3 lift-irrigation systems by Narainpur centre in Chattishgarh to provide irrigation facilities for 176 acres of cultivable land in villages benefiting 79 tribal families; renovation of 25 dilapidated houses of poor rural people in North 24-Parganas district in West Bengal by Janasikshamandira unit of Saradapitha centre; a number of programmes started by Lokasiksha Parishad of Narendrapur centre (Kolkata), viz. a special aromatic plantation training course, poverty alleviation programme through rice innovation system, fluoride mitigation programme, national hand-washing programme, and so on.

During the year under review the Ramakrishna Math started new centres at Haripad in Kerala and at Rajarhat Bishnupur, Kolkata. Under the Math, the following new developments deserve special

mention: starting of an audio-visual unit with personality development programme by Kankurgachhi centre (Kolkata); a mobile medical service unit by Barasat centre (Kolkata); an eye care unit by Rajkot centre; and youth awareness programme by Ulsoor centre (Bangalore).

Outside India, the Math started a new centre at St. Petersburg, Russia. Durban centre in South Africa built a 35-bed home for terminally-ill patients. Germany centre shifted its regular activities to its newly acquired house in Muehlheimam Main near Frankfurt. Japan centre published three books in Japanese language on Srimad Bhagavatam, disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and Vedanta. In Bangladesh, Mymensingh centre started a computer centre, Dinajpur centre constructed a building for students' home and Dhaka centre upgraded its junior high school to high school level.

During the year, the Math and Mission undertook extensive relief and rehabilitation programmes in several parts of the country involving an expenditure of Rs 6.20 crore, benefiting 10.29 lakh people belonging to 2.49 lakh families in 1,616 villages.

Welfare work was done by way of providing scholarships to poor students, pecuniary help to old, sick, and destitute people, etc; the expenditure incurred was Rs 9.54 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 79.05 lakh people through 15 hospitals, 125 dispensaries, and 53 mobile medical units; the expenditure incurred was Rs 77.53 crore.

Nearly 4.84 lakh students were studying in our educational institutions from kindergarten to university level. A sum of Rs 144.53 crore was spent on educational work.

A number of rural and tribal development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of Rs 26.13 crore.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to our members and friends for their kind cooperation and help.

Swami Prabhananda  
General Secretary

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission